

GENEVRA'S MONEY

E. V. LUCAS

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BY

E. V. LUCAS

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CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I	IN WHICH WE STAND AT A GRAVE-SIDE .	I
II	IN WHICH BROTHERS AGREE TO DIFFER .	9
III	IN WHICH LUNCHEON IS TAKEN AT CHISLE- HURST	15
IV	IN WHICH A WORLD'S WORKER BECOMES PHILOSOPHICAL	22
V	IN WHICH GENEVRA'S BROTHER STANDS ON THE BRINK	29
VI	IN WHICH I SET FORTH ON THE CHASE .	34
VII	IN WHICH WE HEAR OF THE MEN OF THE 'THIRTIES	42
VIII	IN WHICH I REJOICE BY FRENCH RIVERS .	46
IX	IN WHICH THE QUARRY IS RUN TO EARTH .	51
X	IN WHICH WE FIND CAPRICE IN A GARAGE	60
XI	IN WHICH A PARENT AND A GUARDIAN ARE UNSHAKEABLE	67
XII	IN WHICH AN EPIGRAMMATIST GETS BUSY .	74
XIII	IN WHICH I PLAY THE MACHIAVELLI . .	79
XIV	IN WHICH WAR AGAIN BREAKS OUT IN THE PENINSULA	86
XV	IN WHICH TWO GENTLEMEN STUDY IBERIA	95
XVI	IN WHICH WE FIND A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE	106

CHAP.		PAGE
XVII	IN WHICH A YOUNG MAN DEFIES THE LAWS	114
XVIII	IN WHICH THE WIND BLOWS ON THE HEATH	123
XIX	IN WHICH A RUBBISH FIRE IS ACTIVE .	131
XX	IN WHICH IT IS DARKEST BEFORE THE DAWN	136
XXI	IN WHICH THE DAWN BREAKS . . .	143
XXII	IN WHICH THE DINNER HYMN IS SUNG .	146
XXIII	IN WHICH A RAILWAY-OFFICIAL BECOMES HUMAN	152
XXIV	IN WHICH WE GO BEHIND THE SCENES .	159
XXV	IN WHICH THE PLOT THICKENS . . .	166
XXVI	IN WHICH DEEDS PREVAIL OVER FAITH .	169
XXVII	IN WHICH THE WOOD GIVES UP ITS SECRET	175
XXVIII	IN WHICH A GOOD SAMARITAN GAMBLES .	180
XXIX	IN WHICH A TRAVELLER IS BAFFLED . .	188
XXX	IN WHICH WE MEET WITH SOLIDARITY .	194
XXXI	IN WHICH A STRANGER ENTERS FROM THE NEW WORLD	203
XXXII	IN WHICH <i>TERRA INCOGNITA</i> BECOMES KNOWN	209
XXXIII	IN WHICH FESTIVITY IS MARRED . . .	215
XXXIV	IN WHICH THE QUEST ENDS VERY SUDDENLY	220

THE PEOPLE IN THIS BOOK

IN THE ORDER IN WHICH THEY APPEAR

CAVANAGH BECKETT—The narrator.

GILES BECKETT—His brother.

PHOEBE MUIR—Genevra's niece.

ELIZA LUSH—A charwoman.

LANCELOT ("VADDY") THOROLD—Genevra's brother.

MARCEL AUBRY—Poste-Restante official at Fontainebleau.

RAOUL FABRE—Artists' colourman at Fontainebleau.

MADAME MARTHE—Keeper of the Brigand's Cave in the Forest.

MADAME SCHALLER of Les Charmettes at Barbizon.

M. PIERRE—A friend of artists.

ANTOINE—Waiter at the "Repos des Pêcheurs" at Moret.

ALISTAIR MUIR—Genevra's nephew, an artist.

ROSE HOLT—An artist.

NOLLIE LETHBRIDGE—Genevra's cousin.

MRS. HOLT—Rose's mother.

DR. GREVILLE—Guardian both to Rose and her mother.

HERBERT JOHNSTON—Giles's valet.

THE JEFE DE STACIONE and other railway-officials at Irun.

SELWYN GRACE—Genevra's nephew.

VERONICA GRACE—His sister.

NORAH GRACE—Their mother.

TONY MUSTERS—A trainer.

WINIFRED MUSTERS—His wife and Genevra's niece.

DEB AND DINKIE—their daughters.

MRS. HADLEY—Vaddy's housekeeper.

JONATHAN NAPPER—A Rye Pensioner.

BELLE TREVOR—Cavanagh Beckett's sister.

"GOLDIE" TREVOR	}	Her children.
"JANE" TREVOR		
"EGGLES" TREVOR		
"CARDIE" TREVOR		
"BISH" TREVOR		

ROGER TEASMOOTH—A railway pundit.

LADY JUDY HILL—A friend of Cavanagh.

DONALD STANTON—Genevra's nephew, an actor.

STEPHENSON WATT—A young engineer.

REV. CYRIL STANTON—Genevra's nephew.

SIR RENDLE VAUX—A friend of Genevra.

THE BISHOP OF DUNCHESTER—Cavanagh's uncle.

FERGUSON—The Bishop's valet.

RHODA TRIM—Cavanagh's parlourmaid.

JENNY THOROLD—Genevra's niece.

ALF STENTOR—A newspaper boy.

GENEVRA'S MONEY

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH WE STAND AT A GRAVE-SIDE

GENEVRA had always refused to be cremated. She had given no reasons: she had merely said that the thought was distasteful. I fancy that what she really could not bear was the finality of it, for, like most women, she had her literal beliefs; and how, I ask you, can a handful of ashes ever rise up at the day of judgment? Apparently she had valued the idea of that ultimate reassembling.

Her will having contained the sentence, "I expressly desire not to be cremated," there was nothing for it but to lay her white placid form—at once so like her and so absolutely a creature of another world—in the unfriendly earth, in that dreadful city of dissolution far up the Finchley Road.

"In the midst of life we are in death," says the sage, but it is extraordinary, none the less, how little the thought of death normally troubles us. It is inevitable; and yet how astonished and bewildered we can be when any one near to us suddenly drops off! And how quickly afterwards the will-to-live relegates to the background again all reminders of mortality! I had known that Genevra was doomed, but that knowledge had made me no more prepared for the loss of her. I may have contem-

plated rearrangement, but one cannot rearrange until the time comes.

I had taken my last farewell long before the funeral ; or thought I had. I had paced the room where she lay, like wax (it is the only simile, and how poor and humiliating !) hour after hour, recalling, perhaps aloud, so many old happinesses, trivial enough, very often, but lovely too ; so many old misunderstandings and, on my part, unfairnesses ; so many delicious readjustments and reconciliations. Even when she had been too much prejudiced I ought, I could see so plainly now, to have given way. Who was I, to be more right than she ?

And in her quiet way she had so enjoyed life that it was monstrous that the gift of it should be thus removed. Fine days would come, the herbaceous borders would bloom and spread their perfume, the thrushes would sing—and she would not be there to see or hear. All gone ! The injustice of it dimmed my eyes.

All our life together I had lived again. Bitter self-reproach had been mine that night, and smarting tears ; and the consciousness (with tears no less smarting) of her complete forgiveness. Even between the most unselfish married people there must be moments of imperfect sympathy, there must be querulous or impatient words : one knows that. Regret for lost opportunities of tenderness and solicitude cannot be absent from the final parting of any lifelong companions. We can never be kind enough.

She had always been finer than I ; and I had always known it. How illuminatingly I knew it now ! It was not because she was dead and lost to me that I knew it ; but because there was no doubt on the matter and never had been. It would be the verdict

of our friends, of our neighbours, and particularly of those clear-sighted observers, our relations. For Genevra's relations to say that poor Jennie's husband was unworthy of her may not be the best of evidence ; but when my relations said that Cavanagh had a better wife than he deserved you were bound to believe.

I was not depreciating myself under the disturbance of grief nor from any feelings of false modesty. I know that I have more good in me than bad, more desire to give pleasure than to withhold it, more impulses towards humanity than cruelty. But one may be constituted thus and yet make a very indifferent archangel in the house : that is all I mean.

For the ideal husband I nourished standards of excellence in others that were too lofty and a too ready vocabulary of criticism and censure. Genevra, on the contrary, was smoother by nature : she had none of my impatience, or, if she had, she had schooled herself to repress it. While I damned the cook she pointed out how much worse a one might have fallen to us and re-enunciated our good fortune in possessing any adherent so faithful and long-suffering as Rhoda. When I was cross and peevish (too often, alas !) she laughed. How I could resent that laughter then ; and what music it would be to my ears to-day !

Strangely enough it was not of any of our bigger differences that I thought most ; but of the little disappointments that I had caused her, often all unconsciously. There was one evening when I stayed at the Club to dine with an old schoolfellow who had suddenly turned up from Africa and whom I should not see again for years. I had telephoned and made everything all right, but Genevra, it seems, had taken infinite pains to have a very special dinner that evening, with two or three of the things that I most

fancied, and she had had to eat it alone with all her pretty intentions frustrated. "I had been so looking forward to it," was all she said. The thought of those words now filled my cup to running over.

There was the occasion when, just as we were starting for Kew, where we went every spring to make notes for our own garden, her fingers were jammed in the door of the carriage; and the light of the sun went out. She had a new dress for the day and had been so radiantly happy. It was no fault of mine, of course, but I found myself thinking of it now in an agony of grief. She had long slender hands, very white, and this injury had led to a bandage for a month. And again she had been "so looking forward to it."

And there was that year when I forgot her birthday. . . .

"Happy," said some foolish proverbialist, "are the dead that the rain rains on." He had better have remained within the region of the known and made some reference to the luckless state of the living who attend funerals in a downpour. February was filling the dykes to the very margin, and it was in a deluge that we surrounded the horrid chasm into which Genevra was to be lowered.

I had seen some of the mourners. My sister Belle had indeed come in the same carriage with me; while others had nodded to me in the church. But I now observed various new faces, some of very distant relations and some whom I did not recognize at all. What a decent lot we are! I thought. How well the world can behave, now and then! For them to come at all was extraordinarily nice, for they knew Genevra very little. To stand out here in the cold and rain was more than nice, and nothing very serious would happen if they were to slip away

now. But they wouldn't. They would see it through even though they were soaked. Amazingly decent!

I suppose that no funeral, with all the machinery of grief and all the necessary hirelings, can be deemed satisfactory; but this method of disposing of the mortal remains of so sweet and happy a creature as Genevra, who was a kind of symbol of brightness and suavity, seemed deplorably wrong. Because she had ceased to be, why should everything be black and horrible? In life she wore gracious colours and cheerful jewels. Because life had suddenly stopped why should her personal tastes be forgotten? It is true that there were flowers; but what flowers! Genevra's flowers were radiant and rich; why should these be cold and formal? Why should our last impressions of her—as of all our friends whose funerals we attend—be associated with such mechanical gloom, marred by such stifling morbid ceremonial and circumstance?

When I said that I had completed my farewell I was of course writing nonsense. No one ever completes a farewell. As I stood in the desolating down-pour, all my regrets came back, and I knew that for ever after, until my own turn came, I should see her lying there all still and pitiful, deep down under the earth. I don't pretend that I wanted to die too and be buried with her; but for what kind of a purpose I should go on living I could not see. The future loomed intolerable.

It was by catching sight of Giles under his umbrella with his hat lifted two inches from his well-groomed head that I shed some of my own trouble, for never did I observe such discomfort on any face and I realized what a concession it was for him to be there at all. Funerals are not in the least in Giles's way. Giles (who is my elder and only brother) will meet

his own end with gentlemanly composure and very likely a jest ; but other people's ailments and ends are carefully excluded from his scheme of life, and he was getting wet at this moment only because he wished to do the right thing by me. In a way the rain was a mitigation, for had the sun shone his thoughts, I knew, would have been wistfully at Sandown Park.

His thoughts might be there, as it was. For who can ever say where another's thoughts are ? It is that ignorance of each other, I remember thinking—looking round on all the faces there, outwardly so serious—that makes the world an abode only of strangers and foreigners. We never wholly meet. . . . Even I, the chief mourner, had found myself remembering what an architect friend of mine told the American lady who consulted him about the design for a suitable repository for the ashes of her late cremated husband. At present they were in a casket ; but where should be its permanent home ? “ Don't have a repository at all,” he had said. “ Take a few of them in an envelope to Westminster Abbey every day and scatter them about, and then you can say he is buried there.”

Meanwhile the undertaker's men, directed by the undertaker himself with such perfect professional tact—half Master of Ceremonies and half the most sensitively bereft survivor there—completed their task and we all breathed again, for in such weather their foothold seemed terrifyingly precarious ; the clergyman, whom subsequently I was also to pay for his gravity, pronounced the last irrevocable words ; and after that last look down, we came away. . . .

There was lunch ready at the house, but I felt that I could not face the company. All those relatives of Genevra's, from whom she was so curiously and

remarkably different (as only the wives that we love can be)—how could I bear to eat among them! My duty was there, at the head of the table, yes; but on certain occasions duty can be honourably avoided, and this surely was one of them. I had done sufficient, I felt, in joining them at the funeral at all, in letting them come there—for Genevra was mine, not theirs,—and now I would please myself, or, more accurately, refrain a little from displeasing myself. The only companion I felt I could endure was Giles; his hard materialism was what I required, his cheerful acceptance of facts.

What were Giles's own ideas on the subject of lunch I did not trouble to guess at; but one thing I knew with certitude, and that was that nothing would have induced him to return to my house. He should therefore sacrifice himself a little more and look after me.

For a man whose suspicion of plans not made by himself is normally acute, he fell in with my suggestion with gratifying readiness, thus providing yet another example of the unexpected kindness that grief can evoke.

"Of course," he said. "Must get away from that horrible crowd. Some nasty fellers there. Did you notice Hugo Muir?"

To Giles the world is divided into a few units who come under the group-heading of good sorts, and millions and billions of nasty fellers.

We entered the first carriage and were driven off, ostensibly towards home.

"We'll lunch at the Bourbon," said Giles.

"No, not a club," I replied. "Not to-day."

"Much better food there than anywhere else," Giles urged.

"No, not a club, if you don't mind," I repeated,

"There'll be men I know. I don't think I could stand that to-day."

"I thought perhaps you'd like distraction," said Giles.

"Not that kind," I replied. "Anywhere but the club."

A faint expression of irritation crossed Giles's face—the mollifying influence of interment was beginning to wear off—but he behaved wonderfully. "All right," he said. "Then we'll go to Claridge's. I'll stop the driver at a post-office and telephone for a quiet table."

I agreed to this. "And while you're telephoning," I said, "will you ring up my place and give a message to Rhoda that I'm not coming, and say that, if Belle won't, Hugo is to be asked to act as host."

"A nasty feller," said Giles.

"Never mind," I answered. "It must be done. Somebody must be in charge. As the husband of Genevra's oldest sister, it may as well be he. He'll like it, too. He likes being important."

"A nasty feller," said Giles. "I never took to him. I meet him at the club in the city; has the cheek to sit at my table sometimes. No notion what to eat. Keeps on askin' me to dinner. And quite time too, considerin' the time I spend in feedin' other people. But do you think I'd dine with him? No. That kind of man doesn't know what to order."

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH BROTHERS AGREE TO DIFFER

GILES is older than I by five or six years, and older than Belle by ten or eleven : just enough older than I, to have made him, when we were boys, very emphatically my senior. And although forty years have passed since those early days when I was his slave, and although I can see his weaknesses, I am still very much his younger brother and the hero-worshipper that I used to be—even although resentment can creep in. For me still, although, knowing him as well as I do, I have no delusions whatever concerning his selfishness and avoidance of human responsibilities—for me he still has a glamour. He still makes me laugh more than far richer or subtler humorists, and the curious part of it is that when I am in his company I feel myself still a boy.

We have been battered by life. I am a grizzled widower, and both our dressing-rooms are full of medicine bottles ; but when we meet he resumes instantly his old rôle of dictator and I my old rôle of listener. I don't wish to suggest that Giles is exactly inhuman—for he can do kind things on occasion if his sense of whimsicality is touched,—but he has made the protection of self a fine art and is an Old Master at it ; he has only himself to think of, and he never forgets the obligation.

His business in the City, which is left largely to his partners, and which he attends only on days on which

there is no racing near London, brings him in a handsome income and enables him to live in his flat in Half Moon Street in the completest comfort. There, with Herbert, his valet, slave, and butt, in attendance, he retires from the fray, surveys his figure in the pier glass as he wonders which of his many elegant suits he will wear, and thanks his lucky stars he is not like any one else. Not like a husband, because husbands are bored by confounded wives; not like a father, because fathers are bored by confounded children; not a poor man, because the poor man has to eat in cheap places and ride in horrible 'buses; and, above all, not the member of a large family with a lot of relations, because relations are nasty fellers and you never know when they'll be borrowin' money from you—or tryin' to.

Our lunch was not convivial, and we said little; but there was a question that Giles, with his direct practical nature and curiosity about other people's finances, could not wholly refrain from asking, and he asked it as we lit our cigars.

"I suppose Genevra's money goes back to her own people?" he inquired.

"Not necessarily," I said.

"I'm glad to hear it," he exclaimed. "I don't like 'em. That Hugo in particular. And Mrs. Stukeley, she's too fat. I hate fat women. But what do you mean by 'not necessarily'?"

"Genevra has given it to me to do as I like with," I said, "but her hope is that it may be used to assist those of her nephews and nieces whom I think worthy of it. I am the sole judge. If I don't approve of any of them, then I must find another object."

"It's a big responsibility," Giles remarked.

"It is," I said. "I expect I shall ask you to advise me."

"That feller Hugo won't like it," said Giles, after another silence.

"I don't expect he will," I said. "But his children might be in the running. He's got a boy and a girl."

"Do they know about this?" Giles asked.

"No, I haven't said a word," I replied.

"They'll all be infestin' Somerset House directly," said Giles. "Any one with a bob can read any will there is."

"The will tells nothing," I said. "The money apparently is left to me absolutely. There's a letter with it, but no one knows that but you."

"Genevra was a good sort," said Giles—and if I ever heard him praise her before, I have forgotten it. His approval was normally silent; he was voluble only where he disliked.

"What is it in?" Giles asked.

"It's just how her father left it," I said. "Some old insurance company. As safe as a rock. The City and Southern Counties. All the girls had the same amount, but what the others have done with theirs I haven't a notion. Genevra spent only half the income, I know, but I never asked."

"I expect that Hugo feller collared his wife's share all right," said Giles. "I never liked him," he added.

"You have said that before," I remarked.

"He's got a ginger moustache," said Giles. "I hate red hair."

"My dear Giles," I ventured to say, "you are too ready to indulge prejudice."

"In my case," he replied, "prejudice is the same as instinct. I'm never wrong. He's a nasty feller. What does he do with his money? Nothin'. A rich man should own a few horses and support racin'.

But is Mr. Hugo Muir among the patrons of the turf? No."

"Is that all you've got against him," I asked, "that he doesn't race and his hair is red?"

"And quite enough, too," said Giles. "He's a nasty feller."

"How much does it come to," he asked, a little later.

"About two thousand a year," I said.

"Now?" Giles inquired. "After the damned Government's done its worst with it?"

"Yes," I said. "That's what it came to last year."

Giles smiled approbation of the amount: he likes the thought of sums of money, even when they are not his own; but his face immediately resumed its normal cynical expression.

"All the same," he said, "the whole business of givin' money to people is wrong. Makin' your own way is a test of efficiency and your fitness to live at all. People who can't do it should go under."

"You say that's the test," I replied; "but how do we know? This world may not have been made for men at all. It may have been made for mice, or ants, and we are only interlopers like the mastodon. Who says it was made for man?"

"It's generally believed so," said Giles. "We get it from Genesis, I suppose."

"Which even the Deans have thrown overboard," I replied. "It may be that everything that we do is wrong. Putting it in the lowest way, you can say that a crafty Jew goes up a mountain and returns with a set of Commandments which, he claims, have a divine origin; and all our conduct is regulated accordingly. But take away the divinity, and the whole table is merely a piece of expediency. It is

certainly more convenient to others that we do not steal or murder, but both actions are undoubtedly very natural and human."

"What on earth has happened to you?" Giles asked. "That's not like you."

"I heard a fellow say it at the Marble Arch one Sunday," I explained. "It may be true."

"It's very dangerous," said Giles. "Forget it. And, I repeat, since we *are* here, and man apparently is boss here, no matter what the mice may do, that the test of fitness to live is the power to make enough to live on; and people who can't do so shouldn't be helped but fired."

"Well," I said, "Genevra didn't think so. And I'm not sure that I do. At any rate, I don't go so far as you—in your speech at any rate. I've known you to be very generous."

"One's weak sometimes," said Giles. "Lunch is a great snare. Dinner too; but after dinner one is safer because one goes to bed, whereas after eatin' a good lunch one knocks about and meets people and does silly things. Goes shoppin' very often—a fatal thing to do. That's the worst of drink, it takes the edge off your wits. I don't say that it doesn't put something there instead which may be more amusin' and comfortable; but drinkin' at lunch is a mistake, anyway. It's one of the things I'm always sayin' I'll never do again. With my intellect at its coldest and best, I repeat that to help people with money is all wrong. Wrong to them and wrong to the community, because you merely prolong their failure, whereas in an ideal State all non self-supporters would be jolly well pole-axed."

"Giles," I said, rising to go, "you're talking bun-kum."

"No," he said, "I'm talkin' sense; but it's the

kind of sense this world will never be ready for."

"Not until the majority is composed solely of Nietzsches and Shaws," I said.

"I don't know anything about 'em," he replied; "but probably they're nasty fellers. A man of my age who has to read books in order to have ideas about life deserves pole-axin' too."

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH LUNCHEON IS TAKEN AT CHISLEHURST

ONE of my early duties, then, was to make the closer acquaintance of Genevra's nephews and nieces, and I decided that, much as I disliked visiting in other houses, it would be best to scrutinize them in their own homes, because it is in their own homes that people are most natural.

I remember a man once saying that whenever a youth confided to him that he was thinking of becoming engaged, he warned him not to do so until he had had the opportunity of seeing how the girl treated her mother and the other members of her family. "If she's all right with them," he said, "she'll be all right with you. If she's a vinegar with them, take to your heels."

"But this," he added to me, "is not the kind of advice that people take. Nature," he explained, "has very carefully seen to it that young men who are thinking of becoming engaged are at that moment incapable of discretion."

How many youthful relations of Genevra there were to inspect, I had to learn, and then where they were placed. If I had not been such a coward about the funeral lunch I might have saved myself much tiresome inquiry, for it is on such occasions that information as to all the other members of a family can not only be obtained but is volunteered. But I had run away and must suffer accordingly.

That there were several of these young people, I knew, for Genevra had four sisters and all had married. There were also two brothers: Vaddy, of whom I shall have much to say, and Horace, who had disappeared years ago, leaving not a wrack behind.

Genevra spoke seldom of Horace, and I was not inquisitive, but piecing together her hints and Vaddy's, I should say that Horace was weak rather than wicked. He had done nothing seriously wrong: he had not embezzled, forged or figured as a co-respondent; he had merely been addicted to drink and inferior company.

"We all," says a character in an American novel that I was reading the other day, "have our pet common people"; and Horace's fault was that his pet common people dominated him. Among them was one of those ladies with a bust, a ready tongue and straw-coloured hair, who used, when I was young, to fill our glasses in the resorts of the thirsty. The type to-day may be different; I have given up bars and so cannot say. This one held her court in a famous West End saloon, to which Horace's wayward feet too often—even if not too directly—carried him. In that era the power of the barmaid was greater than it is now, and it was assisted by a gospel of excess preached by able advocates. Men about Town who rejoiced in nicknames bearing upon their power of absorption had retinues of youthful admirers and imitators; while one weekly paper, in particular, devoted its genius to extolling the glory of frequent if not constant inebriety and the folly of going to bed until the sun was high.

Horace, fresh from Oxford, joined the band of nocturnal revellers and for a while held his own among the worshippers of false gods. But in these matters age and training tell, and he had to give way before

their seasoned experience. During a resultant illness, which he suffered in some unknown lodging, his only friend was this Hebe, whose heart was of a purer gold than her hair, and when he was sufficiently recovered they vanished together to some other land, where she might, I imagine she hoped, pull him round.

A rival theory held by many members of the family was that she had been working to pull him down, her idea being to unite herself to a gentleman ; but Genevra did not accept that. It was too evident that the girl was capable of devotion. Having been the bane, or the bane's partner, she was now the antidote.

Whither Horace had gone, no one knew. Nor if he had prospered or fallen by the way. His mother having died when he was young, and his father having little personal interest in the children, he had not been very sedulously tracked. If he still survived it was probably in one of those countries which offer such a magnetic attraction to England's misfits : Australia, New Zealand, South Africa. But nobody knew. Genevra occasionally murmured " Poor Horace ! " with a sigh, when something called him to mind : seed-cake, for example, of which as a child he had been inordinately fond. But to all intents and purposes he was dead.

It was a melancholy reflection that of the five Thorold sisters only one was now alive. Genevra, who was forty-nine when she died, was somewhere about the middle of the family ; the youngest, had she lived, would have been now about forty. Vaddy, the only son left (if we exclude the unknown quantity, Horace) was rising fifty, he and Genevra having been twins.

I would begin, I decided, with Hugo's brood, partly because his wife was Genevra's oldest sister, partly because I knew where he lived and could easily get there, and not a little because his daughter Phoebe

was just the kind of girl to be able to tell me about her cousins. She had the genealogical instinct.

Hugo Muir was a leading light at Lloyds'. His wife Margaret had died some few years ago, not long after her eldest and favourite son was killed in the war. Two children remained: Alistair and Phoebe. They and their father lived at Chislehurst in a red brick house which, when it comes into the market, will be called a spacious and well-appointed residence, surrounded by its own well-wooded pleasure grounds and with well-stocked kitchen gardens.

I was to have lunch with Hugo and Phoebe, but when I arrived I was told that Hugo had been detained in town by a sudden business call, and Phoebe and I therefore sat down alone. She was a quiet little thing of about twenty-two, short and plump and full of culture, energy and good works. There was no charitable organization in or around Chislehurst that she did not assist or even control, and a volume of Symonds' "History of the Renaissance" was on her occasional table, with her tortoiseshell spectacles in it to mark the place. In the drive I had passed two girl guides who, I have no doubt, were under her orders and were leaving the house with despatches.

Phoebe looked to me like one who would be wooed only by lovers ardently aware of her father's financial standing; but you never know. Very certainly she was not a candidate for any of my poor Genevra's bequest.

At lunch we talked about books, plays and relations. Relations most. The information that I was in need of she gave me. She was not unduly malicious about any of them, but neither was she genial. A little malice seems to be inevitable in all such conversation. The emerging fact was that they were all less the salt of the earth than the Muirs were. I made notes as

to their present addresses and circumstances. She was very kind and sympathetic about dear Aunt Genevra. What a terrible day we had had for the funeral! She was so sorry for every one there in the rain. Her father had been surprised and pained to be placed in a position of such importance at lunch, but he did it beautifully.

We had coffee in her own sitting-room, where, on one of the walls, was a landscape that caught my eye at once and held it. It represented a meadow with the long shadows of trees cast by an afternoon sun sprawling across it. The treatment was broad and simple, the charm of the picture being in its light. It is easy to find, even in National Galleries, so many pictures without any light of their own that one is the more impressed when a treasure of this kind confronts one in a private house, and particularly in such a room as this, the abode of a girl of quite ordinary intelligence, whose taste ran naturally to achievements of colour processes. In fact everything else there was from the Medici Society; this alone was the direct work of the human hand.

"Who did that?" I asked.

"Alistair," she said. "My brother."

"I didn't know he was an artist," I said, conscious that I ought perhaps earlier to have displayed some interest in him. "I thought he was in your father's business."

"So he was till quite recently," Phoebe informed me.

She stopped and lifted her cup.

"Nothing wrong, I hope?" I remarked.

"Not exactly," she said. "But he—well, I don't see why you shouldn't know, as you're his uncle. He broke away. He said he must paint."

I pricked up my ears. This sounded promising.

"Dad was furious about it," Phoebe continued. "He's stopped his allowance and vows he'll never give him another halfpenny."

"He's not absolutely broke?" I asked.

"So far as dad is concerned he would be," said Phoebe. "But he has a little money of his own. From mother, you know. It's very little, but it's something."

"And where is he now?" I asked.

"We don't know for certain," said Phoebe. "He won't tell. But he gets any letters that are sent to the *poste restante* at Fontainebleau. He's afraid of being tracked, I think, and dragged back. You see, he's set his whole being on becoming an artist and he hates Lloyds' like poison. I'm sorry for dad too, because he wanted Alistair to succeed him; but if a boy can paint it seems a sin to force him to spend his time insuring ships, doesn't it?"

"Couldn't he do both?" I asked. "Couldn't he insure ships part of the time and paint the rest?"

"That's what father said," Phoebe informed me. "But Alistair doesn't hold with it. He says that art cannot be served with a divided mind. And he says also that we should do what we like doing. He had some wonderful encouragement from real artists too. Mr. Macphail, you know, the New English man, lives near here, and he's frightfully keen on Alistair. He told father that Alistair's sense of composition is amazing."

"And what did your father say?"

"Oh, he was just unsympathetic. He said that the best thing for Alistair to compose was policies. They couldn't hit it off at all, and so Alistair went. The next thing that happened was a letter from France saying he had decided to become a painter and earn his own living at it."

"And how do you feel about it?" I asked.

"Well," she replied, "I'm afraid I'm in both camps. I see dad's point of view and I see Alistair's. Whether Alistair is right in saying that we should do what we like doing is another matter. I always feel that self-indulgence is wrong."

"At any rate," I said, "this is a kind of self-indulgence that carries hard work and even a little martyrdom with it. I can't help admiring the boy for his independence. To any one with real artistic ambition Lloyds' must be an awful place: just noisy men getting rich. And it is quite clear from that little landscape there, and from your painter friend's belief in him, that Alistair has genuine talent. I should like to think that we had an artist in the family."

"Then you don't take dad's side at all?" she asked.

"I don't say that. I'm sorry for his disappointment. But each generation must work out its own salvation."

As I spoke I made up my mind to find Alistair. But I would do so all unbeknown to him. I would descend on him from a blue sky and see what manner of youth he was. A few days at Fontainebleau when the weather was a little warmer would be a pleasant change.

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH A WORLD'S WORKER BECOMES PHILOSOPHICAL

MRS. LUSH had long been our visiting char, and since I was now getting into the habit of asking almost every one for views as to spending money wisely, I decided one morning, when I found this trusty servitor just finishing the library windows, to put the question to her.

But first I was careful to close the door, for Rhoda does not approve of her employer conversing with any servant but herself. Rhoda's disapprovals can be very tiresome ; but there is something to pay for everything, and they were the price of her fidelity.

Rhoda, I should say, was one of Genevra's legacies to me : a parlourmaid : a formidable virgin of sixty-five or even more, who, having been previously in the service of Genevra's mother, had established a powerful hold on the family. And Rhoda did not hold with friendliness between masters and dependents.

What her opinion of me was, I never knew ; she may have despised me utterly—very likely did—and again she may have looked upon me as a demi-god, or even a deity complete. But no, on second thoughts, not a deity complete, for deities have no faults and I have several. For example, I smoke. I also have the bad habit of making the whole world my ash-tray. Rhoda's attitude, however, never varied ; she

was respectful and frigid. Also exceedingly efficient. She knew where things were. She saw that the supply was kept up—both of such momentary needs as matches, and of such unusual requirements as sealing wax and very large envelopes. She had brown paper and string always at hand. She asked "Have you got the theatre tickets?" as you put on your coat. She was never ruffled on the telephone. She could say "Not at home," with finality.

Rhoda had seen all my wedded life and was now ordering my affairs as a widower. I found her presence irksome, too full of reminders; but I had no power to bid her go.

On Giles's advice I had made the effort.

"I should get rid of that woman," he said. "She'll be a ghost."

"I don't feel I can," I replied. "I don't feel I ought to. I'm not sure that Genevra would have wished it."

"Of course she would," said Giles. "She was a sensible woman. You can't have a ghost about the place. Fix up an annuity for her and let her go. Let's see—how old is she? Sixty-five if she's a minute, but she's the skinny kind that endures. These gristly old birds live for ever. Put her death down at eighty. Fifteen years at two pounds a week; that'll cost you a nice little sum, but it's worth it. If you don't fire her she'll get on your nerves. And then you can find some nice young girl with a smilin' face. You should have young things about you—keeps you young too. Or else get rid of the house and go into rooms, with a good man to look after you, as I do."

"No," I said, "I shall stick to the house—at present at any rate."

I went into the question of an annuity with some

insurance people, but when the proposal was put to Rhoda she repulsed it.

Did I think she was past work? she asked.

I said no; certainly not; of course not; but—

Was I tired of her? she inquired, rather acidly.

I said no again. No, no.

Very well then, she would stay with me as long as she had strength. She called it "strenth."

And the interview closed, leaving me more in bondage than before, and less amenable to it, because I had enjoyed a glimpse of escape.

This was why I shut the door carefully before I proceeded to interrogate Mrs. Lush.

"If you had some money to give away, how would you deal with it?" I asked her, after we had exchanged the time of day and she had remarked that it was heart-breaking, trying to keep windows clean in such weather.

"I've often wondered," she replied. "It's a difficult question."

"Well, you'd look about for the poorest people, I suppose," I said.

"I don't know that I should," she answered. "I don't know that the poorest people are the most in need of money, or, at any rate, that money would be of greater use to them than to some others that you'd never dream of."

She composed herself for oratory, and I filled a pipe.

"You've never done no charing yourself, sir, so you don't know," she began. "Any one who works at charing goes into a lot of houses and sees things. Ladies are very often talkative to chars. Somebody fresh, you know. They're tired of their own servants and they talk to chars by way of a change—same as you might be doing now, sir. But it isn't that you have to listen to them in order to know things, for

one keeps one's eyes open too and often and often one knows all they're going to say before they says it.

"But what I was coming to, sir, is this, that there's many a swell house I've worked in—and I could give you names—where a little money would be more useful than it would be even in the homes of the very poor.

"The very poor get in the way of being poor, don't you see. They almost get to like it, it saves so much trouble. They needn't do lots of worriting things. They needn't wash. They needn't mend their clothes. But there are lots of houses in good streets where the wives are kept so short you wouldn't believe. So long as there's a good dinner in the evening and a good breakfast in the morning, for himself, the master doesn't care. It's nothing to him that his wife has to eat toast and tea in the middle of the day if her week's housekeeping money is to go round at all. It's nothing to him if there's lots of little things she can't do. And I'm not speaking of single cases.

"There's where money might be well spent—in giving some of those wives a little secret fund, so to speak.

"But," she added, "it would be very hard to do. And as likely as not the husband would find out and take it away. They're so artful, husbands.

"I often think about what I'd do with money if I had a lot," she went on, for I had let loose a torrent. "I suppose everybody does. One thing that I'd like to do is to tip the real people."

"Who do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, sir, I don't say exactly that the people you tip now are the wrong ones, but there are others who are much more deserving. When I was a girl I used to help wash-up in one of the big hotels. Any one

who had lunch or dinner in the grand restaurant upstairs—may be yourself, sir, and your good lady who's no more, bless her heart!—if they had nice clean plates and shining knives and forks it was very likely my doing. But did any one ever ask for the kitchen maids to come up and have half a crown pressed into their hands? Never. All the tips went to the waiters, most of them very well off. But there, whatever else you find in this world, you don't find justice. Things are very unequal."

"But there are compensations in every walk of life?" I suggested.

"Yes, sir, I think there are. If you're poor you can thank your lucky stars that you don't have all the worries of the rich. When I read the paper on Sunday afternoon and see how the rich are always being robbed and murdered and divorced, I'm glad I was born to be poor. And they don't ever get to bed, the rich. They're always having supper and dancing. Now I like a good lay down—nine good hours for me."

"Are you happy, Mrs. Lush?" I asked her.

"Fairly," she said. "Since my husband died."

"You didn't get on with him?"

"No. He was a hard, cruel man and we had nothing in common."

"Why didn't you leave him?" I foolishly asked.

"Poor people can't leave each other," she said simply. "There's nowhere to go. They can't afford to leave each other, you see. And there were the children too. It's children that keep homes together. Even when those homes are just little hells. I knew I'd made a mistake before we were married, but I couldn't get out of it. It was too late."

"Why did you ever become engaged?" I asked.

"I wanted to get away from home. That's why

so many girls in our class marry. And if you're not married you don't feel right either. You get chipped for being an old maid and on the shelf."

"Are there many happily married people that you know?" I asked.

"Not many. Women in our class don't see much of their husbands. It's their children they're interested in, and it's their children that keep them down too. As a matter of fact," she said, "I did leave my husband once, when most of the children were big and there were only two little ones. I went right away with those two, and got a place as cook. And what do you think—the ladies who ran the Mothers' Society and other friendly and Christian societies I belonged to, took it for granted that I had gone off with another man and struck me off the books. All my subscription thrown away! That's why I gave up religion. 'Religion's a pastime,' I said, after that. No harm in going to church if you want a rest, but it's not real. I sent my children: it kept them out of mischief: but it's only a pastime."

"And did your husband find you?"

"After two years I heard he was ill and I went back to nurse him. I saw him die."

"Did he say he was sorry?"

"Yes, he said he was sorry for knocking me about. But they all say that. They're afraid of going to the other place if they don't. It was too late anyway; I was glad when he was dead and I could have all my children with me again."

"Then you don't know how a little money would be best given away?" I asked finally, for we had talked enough.

"Not a little," she said. "If it were a lot—millions, say—you might do something. If every one in my street were to have a bathroom and a gas cooker it

would be all to the good. For look at it now—it's the poor who want their meals quickly and cheaply, and it's the poor who get dirtiest ; but the poor have to buy coal in the dearest possible way, by the sack, because they have no cellars, and then to waste it because the fire goes on long after it's needed ; and it's the poor who, if they want to wash, must do it in a basin. It's the rich, with all the time there is at their disposal, who have the time-saving appliances ; it's the rich, who never soil their hands, who have the baths. No, sir," said Mrs. Lush, " there's no equality in things."

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH GENEVRA'S BROTHER STANDS ON THE BRINK

THE distribution of Genevra's money was not my only concern at this time. Worries—if that can be called a worry—have a way of walking in one's direction arm in arm, and the companion on this occasion was Vaddy, Genevra's twin brother and her very special favourite. Twins, I have observed, either love each other or resent each other, and Genevra and Vaddy loved.

And now Vaddy was in a bad way, and if I did not help him there was probably no one else to do so, for his trouble was too intensely personal to interest strangers or even acquaintances. Briefly, he was taking to drink.

It was Giles who brought me to the realization of this fact. You know how you can see a thing a thousand times without seeing it; your mind is not with your eyes; you have no reason to suspect, and therefore don't suspect; and then suddenly revelation comes and at once you pass in review all those other occasions and they are sheer evidence.

It was so in the case of Vaddy. Directly Giles said, in his blunt style, "That brother-in-law of yours was very tight last night at the Bourbon," I knew that Vaddy had been tending that way for a long while.

"I don't mind a feller bein' merry," said Giles. "I'm often merry myself. I like a skinful of wine.

But he mustn't get tight, especially when he's a guest at a club. We drink a lot at the Bourbon, but we don't get tight."

I was alarmed. I knew Vaddy's nature: his amiable friendliness, his dislike of going to bed in his lonely rooms, his want of occupation. And fifty was a bad age to begin the easy descent of the hill.

"I'm sorry," I said. "Do you think I ought to speak to him?"

"I don't say that," said Giles. "It's a ticklish business, talkin' to a man about drinkin'. I should knock down any feller who dared to try it on with me. But then," he added, with a caress of his moustache, "I'm not like that. I know when to stop."

"I must think about it," I said.

"Do," said Giles. "We can't have fellers tight at the Bourbon. It's bad for the place. Why, he actually put coal on the fire in the card room. A guest, mark you. Things like that aren't done, you know."

"No," I said, I hope with sufficient gravity.

Poor Genevra—how she would have grieved had she known this! I could almost feel relief that she had died when she did. And yet, causes being so mixed, her illness, in which anxiety played a part, was, I guessed now, not wholly unconnected with Vaddy's lapses. He and she had been very close and he had no one else whom he knew so intimately.

Vaddy—his real name was Launcelot, but the other pet name had supplanted it almost universally—had been a tutor and army coach and had done well at it. And then, his father, a few years since, leaving him a competency, he had given up his work and settled down into an easy-going, bridge-playing rather untidy clubman, a favourite everywhere.

Retirement is a mistake for most men. Much

work is better than a little, and a little is better than none. In Vaddy's case retirement was a misfortune. His share of his father's wealth put him out of any financial worry far too soon and he substituted conviviality for toil. The eyes that once had studied books were now engrossed in the search for trumps ; the old frugal fare had given place to oysters and champagne.

I remembered once chaffing him about his epicurean development ; without, however, any fear that disaster was to follow.

"My dear boy," he said, "why not ? '*Dulce est,*' you know, and '*Carpe diem.*' God knows I had little enough of life's good things once !"

This was, of course, nonsense ; but Vaddy unconsciously deceived himself into thinking that his early days had been one long struggle for existence. Men who have retired often nurture this delusion. As a matter of fact he had never been even hard up : on leaving Oxford he became at once bear-leader to a peer's son, whom he accompanied round the world and snatched from follies innumerable in every latitude, and he then settled down to prepare expensive young gentlemen for a military career, which, in those distant, peaceful days, tended perhaps more to the ornamental than the lethal. None the less, no evening with Vaddy was complete until he had made some bitter reference—his pleasant expression darkening—to the old times when, by Jingo ! he had had to rough it.

Calling on him in Jermyn Street on the day after Giles had dropped his bombshell, I was shocked. He was the same affectionate fellow as ever, but he looked wrong. He was puffy and shaky and he avoided my eyes.

He began by apologizing for his absence from the

funeral ; which, as a matter of fact, but very oddly, I hadn't noticed.

He couldn't face it, he said. It would have been too much of an ordeal. For him, in particular. He had been fonder of Genevra than anyone, and for a twin to stand by and see his other half buried—no, he couldn't do it. Twins were different from ordinary people. Indeed, he hadn't been himself at all ever since Genevra died.

He was getting rather maudlin, I thought.

"Good heavens!" I said at last. "We don't measure affection by attendance at funerals. There are several other motives that may take one to a grave-side. If you weren't present I am sure there were good enough reasons."

He began to tell me again what those reasons were.

What a much more agreeable world it would be if we could eliminate repetition!

"I'm not antipathetic to you, I trust," I said.

"It's perfectly natural to loathe one's sister's husband, I know, and possibly more so after she dies ; but you don't?"

"No, no," he said, and I am sure he meant it.

"No, no ; I'm fond of you. But I've been a little off sociable duties lately. I've been up too late at night and not out early enough in the morning, and, you know, I'm not as young as I was. I dare say this lotus-eating doesn't suit me after such a strenuous beginning as I had."

"Why not go back into harness?" I asked. "I don't mean drudgery, of course, but get something to do."

"Jolly hard after you're fifty," said Vaddy.

"Yes, but not impossible," I said. "And go a bit slow with food." (I simply daren't add, "and drink.") "If you're not taking exercise you can

so easily eat too much. I hate to see you not yourself."

"I shall be all right after lunch," he said. "The older I get, the more I find lunch bucks me up."

I knew this confession to be a bad sign, but I made no comment.

"Well, good-bye," I said. "Let's have an evening soon, when you feel like it, and, meanwhile, don't let the world beat you."

"Do you think it's beating me?" he asked.

"A little," I said.

"Still, we're of the world, aren't we?" he asked. "Is going with it being beaten?"

"I believe it is," I said. "Although I can't justify that belief by logical argument. But I do honestly believe that every one must put up some kind of a fight."

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH I SET FORTH ON THE CHASE

DIRECTLY the weather was warmer I left for Fontainebleau, intent upon running Alistair to earth.

It was June, when the forest should be at its brightest and an artist at his busiest. Even if I didn't find Alistair I should be enjoying the hunt.

The man behind the *poste restante* brass railings at Fontainebleau knew nothing of Mr. Muir, except that he called now and then for letters and was an *Anglais*. There were no letters for him at the moment.

I asked if when he called he appeared to have come from any distance.

The man said that those who stood in *guichets* had limited opportunities of judging. They did not see legs and boots; only upper parts. Most *Anglais* walked, any way. It was a peculiarity of the English to walk, both men and women.

Could he say when Mr. Muir last called?

No, he could not. He himself went off duty occasionally, and then it would be a *confrère* who handed out the letters. Why did I want to know?

I said that I was anxious to find Mr. Muir. For purely friendly reasons, I hastened to add, for I discerned in the cynical French eye a suggestion of broken laws, vigilant police or outraged husbands: pursuit generally.

The man prepared to resume his ordinary work,

in which a new cigarette was deeply involved, and uttered a grunt of dismissal. The grunt said very clearly, "May be."

All Fontainebleau and its dependencies were therefore to be explored. If Alistair was not in the town itself I must extend operations to Barbizon and Marlotte. Barbizon first, naturally, for that must be the chief magnet to an enthusiastic youth with such *plein airiste* tendencies. But I would dally at Fontainebleau a little. I left a note at the *poste restante* telling Alistair where I was—at the François Premier, feeling that I should be more peaceful there than in the fashionable hotel facing the *château*,—and then I began an inn-to-inn visitation inquiring for Mr. Muir.

He had left no traces, but I think I got on his track at a colour shop, although of course English and American artists can be very much alike and no name had passed. A young man—tall and fresh-looking, in knickerbockers and a cap—had brought some brushes and a tube or two not very long since.

Did I think he had come from any distance?

Yes, because his large shoes were dusty. The shopman had noticed them: the wide welts, so different from anything that French people go in for, had caught his eye. "Ah, you Englishmen," he said, "your clothes are so much better than ours! Your cloth is so strong and warm, and the tailors make the waists of the trousers so much higher. And your boots—an Englishman's boot is his castle! The flimsiness of ours!"

The shopman had been in England, he told me. It was an interesting country.

"You have no notion where the gentleman came from?" I asked.

He had none. The forest was full of such amateurs,

tall, vigorous, untiring. It was extraordinary how different people were! Had I ever seen a young Frenchman walking in Epping or Windsor or the New Forest? No! Never. Nor should I, though I lived to be a thousand. Yet the French were artists too and England was very beautiful. How was it that French artists never left France and the English artists never stayed in England? It must be, he suggested, twinkling, that the English artists wanted to eat, and they walked so much in France in their big boots to get an even larger appetite for French cooking.

In the intervals of my search I let the old town take possession of me. It was lovely summer weather and I drifted about in the park around the *château*, or in the forest itself, with great contentment. After lunch I carried two or three rolls down to the ornamental water to feed the carp. But it was little of it that the carp got, for while they wrangled amongst each other for the unnegotiable crust, the resident swan, type of the profiteer, advanced serenely and purposefully and swallowed it. The Chantilly carp are cleverer, for they have learned to steer the morsel with their blind mouths towards the wall and hold it there till it is moist and absorbable.

As for the *château*, I had seen that before and I did not want to be indoors in the company of sight-seers under a guide's orders. If one might wander in and out and stay long in certain rooms, I might have done so; but these formal hurried processions are impossible.

Fontainebleau has but one blot and that is its school of gunnery. All the morning, from some impossibly early hour till lunch, the cannon roared. I know of no sound more disconcerting to the nerves or destructive of the sylvan spirit. For the frugal

French it must be an even more vexatious infliction, if they are aware of the cost to the national exchequer of every explosion. And in what theatre of war is to be played the drama of which this is the daily rehearsal?

But for the soldiers, who have never done any town any good and are even worse in villages, Fontainebleau would be as serene and distinguished a place to settle in and keep a house in as any that I know. Its streets are clean and broad; its shops are good, and if you don't like them you are only an hour by train from Paris; its houses are comely and white; its air is sweet and tonic; the forest is at your door, and there are delightful woodland surroundings. But its martial reminders are too constant. No artist would choose to work amid such detonations.

I therefore, one morning, sent my luggage to Barbizon by road and myself took one of the paths that led that way. The many notice-boards and M. Dénécourt's map made the route simple.

Not long before this I had been with Genevra to Marlborough, wandering about Savernake, and I realized now how very different was the Wiltshire forest from the French. In a way the differences are those of England and France; for Savernake is rambling and without order outside its main avenue, whereas Fontainebleau is under such perfect control and has been furnished with such a wealth of expository sign-boards that no one who can read can possibly go astray. Even the main avenue of Savernake has the hall-mark of English carelessness, for every tree is hollow and the abode of jackdaws. So many jackdaws I never saw: all noisy of voice and silent of wing—leaving their homes like black spirits. In Fontainebleau there is no wild life of any kind; or at any rate none have I ever seen there, in a series of visits extending over twenty years. Savernake not

only has its jackdaws and other birds, but its deer, and once there, long ago, I came suddenly face to face with a fox and I don't know which of us was the more startled. In the forest of Fontainebleau no birds sing. But what a strange wilderness it is, with its vast, rocky gorges, its high, rocky deserts, its endless straight paths amid chestnut, birch and beech! I met not a soul. But for the almost constant clatter and Klaxoning of motor-cars and lorries on the high-roads that intersect it, there would have been no sound but the humming of flies.

Not till, after fatiguing climbing and very intricate windings and doublings among the rocks, I came to the Brigand's Cave, did I see a human being, and that was either a brigand's wife or widow: a buxom French woman who provided biscuits and wine at a ruinous figure. She lived at Barbizon, she said, and climbed up to her cave every morning, to open it like any other office. At evening she locked it up and returned home with the proceeds of the day's brigandage.

Having eaten a biscuit and smoked a pipe, I bade her farewell and descended by soft sandy ways, amid silver birches, to the famous village, with my thoughts set on lunch at Les Charmettes.

Barbizon may have a railway all along its historic street and be visited several times a day by heavy trains, but it is still beautiful and serene. Between the trains it possesses its soul completely. Nor does the incessant automobile really harm it, for nothing can impair the clearness of the atmosphere or dim the radiance of its sun. And after dusk, when both trains and cars have vanished till the next day, it is almost as it was when the great Men of the 'Thirties discovered it. As I walked along the white street, with creepers hanging over the walls,

on my way to a haven and lunch, I passed Millet's house, and the house of Diaz de la Peña and the house of Jacque, and I saw where Rousseau's steps turned off towards his studio. Other dwellers now live there, but the memorial tablets brought the past very near. I was in a spiritual home.

When I first knew Les Charmettes it was simple as a farmhouse. One sat in a large kitchen-like room, ate at rough tables with coarse linen cloths on them, and as likely as not a forest keeper would stray in for a drink, and his dog—setter or pointer—would nuzzle for tit-bits as one ate. To-day Les Charmettes is more than an inn: it is a hotel. Style has come to it, but not so noticeably as to depress the visitor. Since the motor-car brought Barbizon within two hours of Paris, the village has blossomed into a new prosperity, at any rate for caterers, and on Sundays the restaurants are all crowded; but those who know seek Les Charmettes, where the cooking is admirable and living trout swim in a tank to be selected and caught under the gourmet's eyes. When I first knew Les Charmettes there were deer in an enclosure in the garden and we used to stroll about after breakfast and feed them; but the deer have now gone. The only curiosity that I noticed to take their place was an ingenious and highly civilized machine, no longer in use, on one of the mantelpieces, by which the connoisseur could scientifically decant wine of such an age and preciousness that it needed a steadiness beyond the attainment of most butlers' hands.

Alistair had been to Barbizon: I discovered that at once, for his name was honoured at the inn. But he had left two or three weeks ago: not necessarily the village but Les Charmettes; he might be in lodgings, about which he had made inquiries. Most

probably, however, he had moved on, for gentlemen in lodgings were in the habit of visiting the inn too, and he had not been seen.

Lodgings, said the pleasant landlady, could be very lonely in the evenings, and an artist's evenings are so long.

I agreed.

Mr. Muir, she told me, was so full of energy. He rose so soon and sometimes was out and at work at sunrise.

There were other hotels where he might be known, I ventured.

Truly—but no one who had stayed at Les Charmettes would be likely to visit another in the evenings. Les Charmettes was too well-renowned. The cellar and the cuisine both were famous.

Still, a poor artist . . . I suggested.

Mr. Muir was not poor like that. Nor was the difference in the cost of the hotels so great. He would resort either to Les Charmettes or nowhere. He had been so friendly with them there! No, she felt convinced that he had moved on. Perhaps to Melun, where he could paint the river. Many artists had felt the loss of a river at Barbizon. Or to Moret, where there were two rivers, the Seine and the Loing: he might have gone there. Trees and rocks were not for every one!

"Was I interested in the great Barbizon painters?" she asked.

Surely.

Then I must meet M. Pierre. M. Pierre came in most evenings to smoke his pipe, and I must meet him. He had known them all. He had met Mr. Muir too and could perhaps tell me something about him.

I had lunch in the garden, where were many other

guests—birds of passage for the most part,—and afterwards I rambled about the confines of the village looking for a young man at an easel and looking in vain. Two or three older men I saw, all busy. I found the memorial and immemorial rock with the heads of Millet and Rousseau incised on it, and I was conscious in every direction of scenes that Diaz might have painted and perhaps did paint. Then I left the forest and wandered among the fields in which Millet's peasants used to toil. Of all the Barbizon men these two are the truest to the neighbourhood: Diaz amid the trees and Millet in the tillage.

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH WE HEAR OF THE MEN OF THE 'THIRTIES

M. PIERRE—I never heard his other name—came in after dinner and talked till midnight. A little old man with the whitest hair, moustache and imperial. He wore a brown velveteen coat and cap and might have stepped out of Murger; but he had never been an artist: his attire was donned by way of homage to his heroes. His father had kept a Barbizon inn in the 'fifties and 'sixties, and the boy had been brought up there and had spent his holidays there—he was in a Paris business house—and now he had come back to die, and before dying to enjoy enormously his prestige as the one who knew.

I asked him about Corot.

“Ah!” he said, “every one wants to know about Corot. But Corot was not a Barbizon man. Corot was of Ville d’Avray. He came here long ago—long before any of the others—he was much older, you know—but only for a few days. In the 'twenties, I believe. He never had a house here, never lived here. I saw him only when he came to visit Millet. Poor Millet, he was always the better for seeing Corot, Corot was so gay and Millet so dejected. With Millet nothing could go right, there was always a new trouble; but Corot was born jolly and forced others to be jolly as well. Everybody was the happier

for seeing him. And better off too, for his purse was yours. You see, he sold well and had no dependents. He never married anyone but his Art.

"Not that a man is necessarily generous because he sells well and has no dependents," M. Pierre went on. "Far from it!"

"What was Corot like to look at?" I asked.

"Corot—he was just a great jolly boy. A *vieux garçon* literally. He was more or less clean-shaven, with a great shock of hair, which grew to be quite white. He was never without his pipe. Very bright eyes and a ruddy complexion. He wore a cap, and when he worked, I am told—but I never saw him at work as I saw the others—a blue blouse like a peasant. At heart he remained a peasant.

"He was happy because he painted beautiful things, and he painted beautiful things because he was happy. It was what you might call a virtuous circle! He couldn't endure unhappiness: he would not think of it unless it was brought to his notice, and then he put his hand in his pockets and bought peace of mind for himself again by generosity. Perhaps for the others too; but it is not a certainty. Money can do much but not all. And all the time he used to refer to himself as a miser!"

I said that I thought I admired his work more—or at any rate that his work was more sympathetic to me—than that of any of the Barbizon men.

"But he wasn't a Barbizon man," M. Pierre repeated excitedly. "In the sense of being the friend, and perhaps inspirer, of Barbizon men, yes; but not otherwise. I must have a notice—an *affiche*—printed, and hung round my neck, saying that Corot was not a Barbizon man and that he never lived here, and that I did not really know him. It is the first question they all ask."

"It is a very widely spread error," I said.

"But he was not a Barbizon man. He was a *plein airiste*, yes ; he was a pioneer with great influence ; but he was not a Barbizon man. He painted almost nothing here. He painted at Ville d'Avray and out of his kind old head. He dreamed landscapes too, and hopped out of bed to get them down on canvas. But at Barbizon—no."

"And Daubigny ? " I asked.

"There you go again !" said M. Pierre. "Daubigny was not a Barbizon man either. Daubigny was a painter of water, and where is our water ? Daubigny loved rivers and there is no river here nearer than at Melun. He loved rivers so much that he lived on a barge and it took him all over France. He would have been stifled here. But the world insists that he was a Barbizon man."

"Then who were the Barbizon men ? " I asked.

"Haven't you seen the rock over yonder ? " replied M. Pierre. "With two heads cut on it ? Those were the Barbizon men—Rousseau and Millet. They lived here and worked here and died here. You may visit their homes. Rousseau's studio is now a chapel ; Millet's house has a new tenant. Their names are on the walls. They were Barbizon men and they were unhappy men. Both had to endure years of neglect because the world was blind. Both were sad. Their nature was sad and their lives were sad. Millet was almost never out of debt for the sheer necessities—bread and clothes for his children. Rousseau was a tragic man ; one of his friends committed suicide in his house here, his mistress went out of her mind. Tragedy pursued him ; it does, some people. They were very kind to me always, but they did not laugh.

"The laugher," he went on, "was Diaz, another Barbizon man, whose house you may also see : Diaz

the Spaniard. In a way Diaz was the most essentially a Barbizon man, for you cannot walk ten yards in the forest in any direction without coming upon one of his pictures. You know them—the silver birch trunks, the foliage with the sun spattering through. Well, they are everywhere. By looking at Diaz' pictures you know the forest before you ever come to it.

"But Rousseau does not prepare you like that, even though he painted here; nor Millet. Rousseau went to the edge of the forest for his scenes; Millet painted peasants in the fields. It was Diaz who wasn't happy outside its boundaries.

"And how different he was from those others! For every sigh they uttered he had a laugh. He was a *bon garçon* if you like. He sang and cracked his jokes and told his naughty stories all the time. I can see him now, stumping along on his wooden leg, back from the forest to lunch, with his easel and box, his great plain face all hot and gay. But if he was angry, didn't he let you have it! Those were the Barbizon men."

"There were others too?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. There were Troyon and Dupré and Jacque, but those were the three. They made the place."

I asked him if he remembered meeting a Mr. Muir not long since. A young English artist. Fair hair. Very much the enthusiast, I believed.

"Ah, yes. He was painting in the forest. But it did not suit his style. He needs something more open, more simple. I told him to go to Moret and set up his easel on the banks of the Loing."

"And do you think he went there?" I asked.

"Yes. I should guess so. He was in the impressionable stage when one takes advice."

"How long ago was that?" I asked.

"Some two months," said M. Pierre.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH I REJOICE BY FRENCH RIVERS

THE next day I was off early, by car, to Moret ; which is a mediæval town within its own gates and possessed of every charm but a good inn : good, that is, in comparison with Les Charmettes or the princely hotels of Fontainebleau. Having deposited my bag at the Cheval Noir outside the town, I began my search.

You first pass through an imposing portal and then, after threading a quarter of a mile of narrow main street, with a few shops and a café or two, and passing an ancient building where Napoleon slept on his way from Elba to Fontainebleau (as a tablet records), you leave the town again by a second portal and are immediately on the bridge that crosses the Loing, with a wide prospect of water, trees and hills before you.

The city walls rise sheer from the river on this side, with odd little houses built on them, one of which offers for sale every article that the angler can require, except perhaps patience.

I leaned for a while over the parapet of the bridge—to do which is one of the purest of human pleasures—and looked down the river and up. It was a cloudless day and in the distance the water was silver and blue. Close at hand it was dark and green, and immediately below me was a little company of washerwomen on their knees, scrubbing away at their linen

and chattering without ceasing, except to laugh. To what extent I was the cause of their laughter I could only guess, but they all had an eye on me.

I moved on across the long bridge that carries you, past two enisled water-mills, to the farther bank. There, looking back, you see how nobly the middle ages have been respected. All towns built beside a river have a certain romantic quality, but when they are entered by a venerable gate in a wall this quality is enormously heightened.

Moret rises towards the south, and half-way up the hill is the church, with long plain windows letting the light right through, and above it, on the top of the hill, the ancient castle.

Just below the country end of the bridge the road turns to the left, and here I strayed down an alley to the edge of the Loing to let the scene sink in. The noise of the water through the weir filled the air; now and then a car or wagon rumbled across the bridge; the swallows darted back and forth; and as I stood there, placidly smoking, a man in a blue jacket, with his trousers rolled up over naked legs, came down the alley with a couple of horses, riding one and leading the other, and taking them into the water farther and farther until he was submerged to his knees.

A man in a blue jacket on a white horse up to its middle in a French river is a very attractive sight, and there is something very soothing in the spectacle and in the sound of the splashing as the creatures move. It was all very foreign and delightful.

Then I left the alley, and walking a little way along the road came to a river-side meadow, with seats and trees; and there, a hundred yards away, sketching, were a man and a girl.

Had the man been alone I should have reconnoitred,

and if he were young enough for Alistair I should perhaps have addressed him; but I could not encroach on a party of two. The girl wore a light blue overall and her fair hair was bobbed; the man was in tweeds. They were close together and seemed to be painting the same subject: Moret's massed bulk and the Loing catching its reflections.

Having learned that there was a restaurant a little farther along, I moved away and came soon to a shabby river-side place. At the moment—about half-past eleven—I was its sole support, and my hopes of a tolerable meal would have fallen low indeed if I had not in my time been much in France and learned that appearances have no value there. In England a decayed inn means inferior food or no food at all, long waits, slovenliness, squalor. In France there is no relation whatever between the façade and the kitchen.

If I would take a table under the trees, I was assured by the waiter, who was completing his toilet as he spoke, an excellent déjeuner should be spread before me. He finished buttoning his sorry waistcoat and vanished, and I walked through the garden, which was gravelled and much given up to swings and games, to the edge of the stream, where I found a table all ready laid, with a clean cloth and a clean napkin. Seating myself I lighted another pipe and prepared to be deliciously contented.

I don't want to add another stone to the vast pile of missiles that have been flung at my poor old country; but one of the questions which must be asked on that Day of Days when all information is given, will bear upon England's incapacity to serve food in the open air.

I was musing idly upon this strange difference between two neighbouring nations, when a little dish

of fresh radishes arrived, with rolls and butter. The next dish was a *friture* of fish from the Loing, several varieties of which had, largely for my benefit, exchanged the river for the frying-pan. Then a plump cube of rumpsteak with watercress and a little dab of *maître d'hôtel* butter on it, accompanied by a salad. I had been offered white wine or red, but I chose a light beer brewed a few miles away, at Melun. To crown all came some of the best cheese in the world, the cheese of Brie.

It was a perfect meal, eaten under perfect conditions, and I was more than ever grateful to Alistair Muir for quarrelling with his father, taking up painting and concealing himself in the Forest of Fontainebleau.

Meanwhile the Loing was regaling me with its symphony: the quiet lapping of its little waves against the bank, the gentle rustle of leaves, the sounds carried across the surface from a boat-builder's yard, cries of children, notes of birds and the occasional hoot of a steamer from the not very distant Seine, where the barges congregate. Above all, the hot sun and that murmur in the air which a hot sun engenders.

Now and then other customers arrived—cyclists chiefly, and motorists, and one party in a boat, rowing abominably and dressed as if for comic opera—and the neighbouring tables began to fill up. They were all jolly and in holiday mood, and all either very hungry or very greedy, for I heard them giving terrific orders. My discreet meal would have been nothing but *hors d'œuvre* to theirs.

Whenever he could spare a minute I talked with the waiter.

"Do many artists come here?" I asked.

"Numbers," he said. "All the time, in the summer."

"There are some here now?"

"Not staying in the hotel, but we have them to lunch and sometimes dinner."

"French?"

"Yes, mostly. But English too and American."

I asked him how he knew the difference between English and Americans.

The Americans talked more, he said. And they were particular in ordering their food and before they ate it. The English were more particular during their food.

I asked which gave the larger tips.

"The Americans used to," he said, "but they don't any more."

Was there a young English artist frequenting the place at the present time? I asked.

Yes. One. With a lady. The table over there was reserved for them every day. They lunched late.

He looked at his watch. If they were coming they were almost due, he said.

"The lady is in blue and has short light hair?" I asked.

"The same. She is very *gentille*."

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH THE QUARRY IS RUN TO EARTH

WHEN, in a few minutes, they arrived, I saw at once that the man was young enough to be Alistair and that even though to be *gentille* is the destiny of too many of us (with money in our pockets) in France, the girl justified the encomium of the waiter, who, however, probably referred rather to character than looks. Of that I should be able in time to judge; meanwhile, I could see that she was attractive. She was not pretty in the musical-comedy way, with regular little features. Feature by feature she might indeed have been called plain; but all were agreeably blunted or softened, and through them shone a radiance. Her face emitted light.

She talked with animation and expression, whereas her companion said little, and seemed to have his thoughts elsewhere. He could not, however, be called rude.

He was a good-looking typical young Englishman and might very easily have been Genevra's nephew. But since he might just as easily have been some one else, I made no overtures.

When, however, the girl suddenly exclaimed, drawing his attention to a heron sailing over us, "Oh, Alistair, look!" I felt that this was my man.

But the girl—who was the girl? Was she perhaps the real goddess and Art only the counterfeit? Did

Chislehurst know about her? Hugo, I am sure, did not, but Phoebe, Alistair's mousy little sister, did she know?

Yet he did not seem to be in love. His mind was evidently occupied with other things; and if the girl looked at him with any special tenderness he did not notice it. I could have thought of them as chance painting acquaintances if it hadn't been for that "Oh, Alistair!"

Alistairs not being very numerous, I decided to risk it.

I wrote on a visiting-card: "May your uncle introduce himself?" and sent it over by the waiter.

Alistair read it, flushed, said something to the girl and came to my table.

He began with something formal about Genevra's death, and asked how I came to be there.

I told him I had heard from his sister that he was somewhere in the forest, and, being in the forest too, I had been on the look-out for him.

He invited me to join him and his companion and I did so. He introduced her as Miss Holt and said they were studying at the same school in Paris. It did not seem to occur to him that it was not a quite sufficient explanation.

"You are going to be an artist?" I asked her.

"I hope so. I long to be," she said. "But it's awfully difficult. And Mr. Muir fills me with misgivings, he's so good."

Alistair denied this. He wished to Heaven he *was* good, he said.

But the problems! He had hardly said a word at lunch, he continued, because he was trying to work out the colour for a certain shadow. Everything had a different-coloured shadow. There were problems all the time, and they absolutely filled one's thoughts.

I told him I had heard of him at Barbizon. From Monsieur Pierre.

"Oh, that old boy!" he said. "I couldn't understand half of what he said, but I owe him something for sending me to Moret."

"And I also," I said.

I asked where they were staying, adding that I didn't think much of my inn.

"We've got rooms in the same house," Miss Holt hastened to say.

"It was all I could get for her," Alistair explained.

"They're quite good," said Miss Holt. "Don't you love France?" she went on. "I do. They make it so easy to be simple. The little portions of food you can buy! No waste. And the clever things the people in the shops all say. Every one seems to me to be witty and friendly."

"'It's your money they want,'" quoted Alistair grimly.

"I don't mind if it is," said Miss Holt. "But as a maffact"—(she had an amusing way of compressing the three words "matter of fact" into one)—"I don't believe it is, always, either. I think they really like us, sometimes."

"Girls—yes," Alistair admitted, again rather grimly.

"What do *you* think?" Miss Holt asked me. "Alistair's always so grudging about French things—excepting their pictures."

"Some of them," Alistair put in.

"I," I said. "Oh, I think the French are a very clever people. And I agree with you about their conversation. Style is in the blood. Scotch peasants haven't got more—and that's saying a good deal. But they always frighten me a little, too: they're so logical, so intent on their purposes, so hard."

"I haven't been here long enough to see all that,"

said Miss Holt. "I like almost everything I've seen of them."

"And I hope you always will," I said.

"Except their clothes," she added. "The rich are so elaborate and the others are so stuffy. For the nation that sets the fashion it's extraordinary how dull and dreary the clothes as a whole are. English middle-class women are like birds of paradise compared with the French."

"They're rather fond of mourning over here," I remarked.

"Yes—but it's not that. It's their downright commonplaceness in dress that I mean. Dingy, dingy!"

I told Alistair of the picture I had seen in his sister's room. "Are you sticking to that broad simplicity?" I asked.

Yes, he said. He would as soon paint like Corot as anyone. The straightforward representation, with a broad brush. Light and air were the crux. And there must be beauty and repose. Pictures should soothe. He had no patience with the latest experimentalists and the effort to get restlessness into paint.

As he talked I saw a beam of something very like adoration in his companion's eyes. So there might be something there, after all. . . . I asked him if Moret was a favourite spot for artists.

He had seen a few, he said. But the great name there, of course, was Sisley. Surely I knew of him?

Very little, I said, but his work had always left me happier.

He lived at Moret, it seems: there was a tablet on his house. He died in 1899: Alfred Sisley, the most radiant of the Impressionists, the colleague of Claude Monet and Pissarro. Wonderful men, said Alis-

tair, growing eloquent, devoted to Nature and Art, who painted with what might be called double vision. They could see the effect of every touch as they painted; whereas to the onlooker it was nothing until he retreated several feet. No one got so much of the freshness of the sky, the gaiety of trees and the life of the stream into a picture as Sisley did. But such painting was not to be learned: it was peculiar to the artist and the secret perished with him, being so largely personality. To his own—Alistair's—mind the method of Corot was the sounder and the more enduring. He would show me Sisley's house.

I asked them to dine with me that evening. "Where would you like?" I went on. "Here, or shall we get a car and go to Fontainebleau?"

"Fontainebleau would be very jolly," said the girl; but I saw Alistair frown.

"I think it would be better here," he said. "If you don't mind, I'm rather off cars and that kind of luxury."

I asked Miss Holt to get the waiter and order everything she liked best, because that would be our choice too; and then they went back to their meadow to continue their work, while I walked towards the meeting-place of the Seine and the Loing, where I set up the acutest suspicion in the minds of all the noisy loyal little watch-dogs on the barges, and talked here and there with the wives of the bargees as they sat knitting or sewing in the sun outside their abodes, near the rudder.

Barge life has always had an attraction for me: the leisureliness of it and the peace; and I wondered if Alistair knew about Daubigny's boat and if it would interest him to follow that great painter's example.

I wondered other things about him too, and even

more about that very candid crystal-honest girl with him ; and I wished, for her sake, that he was less moody and introspective.

It had been arranged that I should call for Alistair and Rose at their lodgings, which were in the street where the church is, a few yards from the office which the nuns who make the *sucre d'orge* of Moret have had to open, in response to the demand for that consecrated sweetmeat.

When I arrived, Alistair had spread out a number of his sketches and I was again struck by the skill with which he painted light or suggested light. But to what extent these canvases would be popular I could not guess. Taste has latterly departed so far from sheer beauty, and Alistair had none of the modern tricks. He cubed nothing. That the pendulum would one day swing back I felt sure, but could Alistair's proud spirit hold out ?

"It's a heart-breaking prospect," he said, "earning one's living as an artist. Do you know, I've been counting the professional artists in the directory at the end of 'The Year's Art,' and how many do you think there are ? And they aren't all, by any means. How many ?"

I had no notion, but to please him I guessed. "Two thousand ?" I suggested.

"Two thousand ! Do you know," he said impressively, "there are between eight thousand and nine thousand. And now here am I, preparing to join in the struggle too. All the same," he went on, "I mean to go on."

Some of Miss Holt's sketches were spread out too, but Alistair was restless and we started off for dinner before I was able to examine them properly. They struck me as being rather loose, but they had breadth and freshness.

"I'll never be much good," she said. "But how I love it!"

We had a quiet dinner under the trees, with more picture talk, and, after pausing outside Sisley's house, I said good-bye to them at their door.

"What do you usually do in the evenings?" I asked as I was leaving.

They worked at their French. Rose, like all girls of her class, had far more than he; and she helped him. They were reading a novel together.

More danger, I thought, until Rose explained that it was "*Les Trois Mousquetaires*."

And so I left them and walked down their steep hill, past the sacred barley-sugar shop, and through the river gate, and stood for a while listening to the rushing water and thinking about *la vie* in general and the special manifestation of it up there, on the hill, between the church and the castle.

That Alistair was seriously compromising his young ardent friend, I am sure never occurred to him, and she, did she think of it, would have laughed it away. But I didn't like it.

And so I sought my pillow at the Cheval Noir, and the next morning, early, I left for home.

But even amid the distractions of London I did not forget the young couple. In fact, as I walked about the streets and saw all the expensive foolishness going on, the cars and cabs whirling gilded lads and lasses to costly hotel *thés dansants*, to dinners, heated playhouses and night clubs, my thoughts wandered to the little walled town in France, where a resolute youthful artist in old tweeds, and shoes with welts that were the bewilderment of the peasantry, sallied forth every morning with his paint-box and easel, bent upon catching before evening as much of the beauty of the world as might be, and imprisoning it on canvas.

I was conscious of the fresh air all about him, and the trees rustling and the river murmuring, and the comfortable barges floating by with little green villas at the stern.

And I pictured him sharing his lunch in the shade by the stream with a bobbed-haired girl as keen as himself.

It is more than likely that at this point I sighed. I had never quite got over my jealousy of these young people, flourishing in these unconventional times and following a calling where there is more living-and-letting-live than in any other except the stage; but the stage does not bear dragging into the comparison, because the artist is of the day and the actor of the night.

When, thirty and more years ago, I was their age, there was no bobbed hair, and if a girl left home and joined an art student in his French lodging she was lost.

That Rose loved Alistair I was now quite convinced. But what his feelings were towards her I could not say. Confound these fellows (I thought) with some talent or other, who can get devoted adherents by sheer aloofness. The more they disregard their adorers the more they are adored. No wonder he left Lloyds'. Sheer instinct. The Roses of the world don't care twopence for underwriters, but let them get only a glimpse of a paint-brush or a pen and they're on fire to serve.

Abra was there before he called her name,
And when he called another, Abra came.

Where did I learn those lines? I hadn't a notion. But they occurred to me at that moment and fitted into the thought like the last piece in a jig-saw puzzle.

In spite of any resentment I might entertain towards

Alistair, when next I saw Giles I told him that I was considering that young man as a possible candidate for preferment.

"I shouldn't touch artists myself," he said. "I don't care for 'em. Nasty fellers with long hair and velveteen jackets who don't dress for dinner."

"But you like pictures when you like them," I objected.

"Very few," he said. "Huntin' and racin' prints, yes. But the things I see in the Bond Street Galleries—they're horrible. It seems to me that the whole business of modern paintin' is not to see straight. What kind of things does young Muir turn out?"

I said that Alistair was a landscape man.

"Poplars, I suppose," said Giles. "I hate the tree."

I was going to explain that Alistair was under the influence of the Barbizon School, but I realized that that would be futile. So far as Giles was concerned, Corot, Rousseau, Millet, Daubigny, and Diaz had come into the world, lived, suffered, toiled and triumphed all in vain. By not one stroke of their brushes was he the happier, the better, the more sensitive to the visible world! It was a depressing thought.

For the moment, as he stood there complacently surveying his handsome head and long, lean figure in the glass, I felt that I hated him.

But only for the moment.

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH WE FIND CAPRICE IN A GARAGE

IT was without any spasm of surprise that one morning, on opening a letter in a strange hand, I found an appeal for financial help from a girl, the daughter of Genevra's cousin, Henry Stuart-Crane. She was convinced, she said, that Genevra would have expressed the wish that her money might go to the benefit of her relations. Being, at the moment, in rather acute need of a temporary loan of twenty-five pounds, she was applying to me. Would I call and have tea?

No letter could have been expressed with less ambiguity; and that I liked. Candour is so rare.

She lived, she went on to say, over a garage in Mayfair Mews. The letter was signed Nollie Lethbridge.

I had a faint recollection of this Nollie as a reclusive graceful child of uncompromising sincerity, with very long legs in black stockings; and I thought I would go. Also I wanted to see what these new fashionable garage-homes were like.

Threading my way between car-cleaners and over puddles of oil and water, where the rattle of machinery took the place of the old hissing of grooms and stamping of horses, and the odour of petrol had for ever superseded the warm friendly aroma of the stables, I found No. 14a and ascended a narrow staircase, at the top of which was a door painted in bright green,

with a bronze knocker fashioned in the form of a languorous woman with nothing on.

After I had put this voluptuous instrument of communication into action, the door mysteriously opened an inch or two by means of what I afterwards discovered to be a released spring. I hesitated for a moment or so, in expectation of a human appearance, and then, hearing a voice bidding me shut the door again and come into the sitting-room, I entered.

There, on a Cubist sofa with Vorticist pillows, reclined a slender black-eyed creature in a charming Bakst *négligé*.

"You must forgive me for not getting up," she said, "but I've sprained my ankle. I haven't got a maid and my old woman's never here in the afternoons."

After looking in vain for a chair and not finding one, I subsided upon a black satin divan with a pattern of vermilion triangles on it and cushions to match, fringed with highly-coloured fruit.

"I'm rather done for with this foot," said my hostess, in her soft yet decisive voice, "but I took a chance it was you and opened the door. Lucky it wasn't a thief. You see, as I live here all alone and am no earthly use at anything, the place is full of labour-saving devices. If you're ready for tea I'll switch the kettle on."

"You must excuse me if I seem inquisitive," I said, "but I don't know why you should be alone. I hope Lethbridge isn't dead."

She laughed, frankly and joyously.

"Pobble dead!" she exclaimed. "Rather not. Pobble will live for ever. No, he's in Africa somewhere. You see we got fed up with each other and decided to be independent again. But the bore is he hasn't sent me my allowance for quite a long time

and I wondered if you would lend me something to go on with. Only a loan, really. I always pay back. But don't if you don't want to," she hastily added. "I shall muddle through all right; I always have done. But you'll get it back all right. Pobble's rolling in money and it only means that the bank hasn't been properly instructed. I've sent him a cable."

I must not give the impression that Cousin Nollie suggested impropriety. Her environment may have been exotic, but her personality was sweet and wholesome. Her unconventionality—and even that would soon be conventionality in this imitative city—was merely a veneer. What was wrong with her, as she said, was inability to do anything. She possessed neither arts nor crafts. Even if she were of a more vigorous body and more ambitious soul she would have been hard put to it to earn a living. Brought up in comfort, if not luxury, she had learnt nothing but the way to be indolent and happy. She did not even dance; the theatre was a bore; dining out was a bore. Among her hectic cushions she was content, with cigarettes handy and a batch of the latest novels, English and French. Nothing troubled her but want of pence.

She was so frank that she made me frank too, and I asked many questions.

She told me that she was twenty-two. She had married Archie Lethbridge four years ago. He was the kindest thing on earth, but she was bored by him. Why shouldn't she be? And if she was bored, why shouldn't she admit it?

I said that marriage meant compromise. Had she tried to accommodate herself to him? I asked, to make allowances? to make, in short, the best of it?

She said that to separate was to make the best of it.

I asked about loving, honouring and obeying, and she said that that was rubbish. Who could carry out such promises as that? We never ought to be asked to make them.

In answer to another question she said that she thought Pobble was as fond of her as he could be. But he had no masterfulness, no magnetism. He was just nice and amenable.

I asked her if there was anyone else that she loved. She said no.

I asked her if she wanted to love anyone else or be loved.

She said it was rather fun to be loved and watch men losing their heads. But it was a bore too. She herself had no real desire for a lover, and probably never would find the ideal man because she was not the kind of girl that the kind of man she most wanted would want.

I was immensely struck by that. Surely such pitiless self-examination is very unusual? Her knowledge of herself was minute, and she had no delusions.

"I don't attract the best kind of man," she said. "As a rule I attract wrong 'uns. They think I'm their sort because I dress smartly and walk slowly. I'm always being followed, sometimes to the very door. I can't blame them, and I don't know that I despise them, because life's such a muddle. And it's natural too: males want females all through nature. And I know I'm more striking looking than I ought to be. I hear the chauffeurs whistling after I've passed. But nothing of that kind interests me."

I asked her if her husband wrote.

"Oh, yes: the sweetest letters. I wish he wouldn't."

"And wouldn't he like to meet with a woman who really loved him?"

She doubted it. He was the kind who liked loving better than being loved. He was incapable of any *grande passion*. He was just a nice, jolly, good-at-games, good-form young man.

"I feel for him," I said. "I suppose it's true that what so many of you women want is a rotter. We do our best to be chivalrous and solicitous, and it's all waste of time. A nice man's no good; a rich man—just as a rich man—is no good; an honest man is no good: what you want is a rotter, and the more he bleeds you and bruises you the more you like him."

"I don't think that applies to me," she said. "But I used to think I should like to be taken off my feet. Probably it would be a bore, though."

"Well," I said, "you beat me. But I'm always being beaten. I was brought up to believe that men wanted women and women wanted men, and everything used to be done to get them together and fix them up for life. But that seems to be all over. Everything is changing. Why, if you had lived alone like this when I was your age, over a stable, with your husband big-game hunting in Africa, you would have been cut dead. Your reputation would have been the worst possible and no one would receive you. But now I suppose you know hundreds of the best people, or could if you wished, and no one cares a hang where you live, or how. What does your mother say?"

"She thinks I'm a crank," said Nollie, "and wishes I wasn't. But she's jealous of my independence too. You see, she's fed up with father."

"And what does your father think about you?"

"Oh, he's a dear. He comes and has tea whenever

he's in town. But just now he's in Ceylon. Otherwise I shouldn't have worried you about the money. May I have it?"

I gave it to her, of course. But not out of Genevra's purse. It was my own affair and she paid it back almost at once, the bank having received its new instructions.

I told Giles about my visit to Nollie.

"What a silly feller you are," he said, "playin' with fire like that. You're askin' for trouble."

"Oh, well," I said, "I couldn't sleep at night if I disregarded appeals—at any rate those that seem genuine. It's self-protection on my part."

"I shouldn't sleep if I did," Giles replied.

"Well, we differ," I said. "The Haves, I feel, must do something for the Have-nots. You don't agree."

"Most assuredly not," he replied. "The Have-nots have jolly well got to learn that not havin' is a crime. People who do their duty, have. If I'm not exactly a poor man myself, why is it?" He fixed me with his confident, self-satisfied eye. "Why is it? Tell me."

"A good deal," I said, "because the Old Man left us each a decent sum of money."

"Not at all," said Giles, "not at all. The money the Old Man left me is nothin' compared with what I've got; and why? Because I've worked, sir; because I've done my duty, sir. Because I haven't been a waster. Not that I haven't done things for other people. Oh, no. They live on me. But I'm not a fool, sir."

"All right," I said. "But about this girl—I rather thought you met her some years ago when we had that house at Lymington: she and her father were there, with you: a very striking girl of about

fourteen. You were rather kind to her, I recollect "

" I can't remember all the people I have been kind to," said Giles pompously. " Well, what about her? Where does she live? "

I told him.

" I've heard of those converted garages," he said; " but they sound disgustin' to me. The idea of bein' surrounded by chauffeurs is revoltin'. Horrible fellers who never know the way and are too obstinate to ask. And how can you sleep, with the cars comin' in at all hours in the night? Where's her husband? " he asked.

I told him.

" I don't know what's comin' to the world," he said. " One hears of nothin' but husbands and wives leavin' each other. Nothin' would induce me to marry, but if I did, by George, sir, I'd marry some one I was goin' to stick to. Marriage used to mean cleavin' to each other. Cleavin', sir. Now it's just a trick to make sure that there shall be at any rate two persons in the world who will never meet again."

He turned to go.

" What garage is she in? " he asked.

" Mayfair Mews," I said.

" Revoltin' places," he replied. " What number? "

" 14a," I said.

" I'll pass through there one fine afternoon," he said, " and have a look at that knocker."

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH A PARENT AND A GUARDIAN ARE UNSHAKEABLE

ROSE HOLT had told me that her mother was living at Rye, and a few weeks after my return to England I called on her.

I felt that I wanted to know more about Rose and what were her mother's plans for her. I was not proposing to play the eavesdropper and give the girl away; but she should not squander herself on my nephew without a protest from me, especially if he was to become one of Geneva's *protégés*.

Mrs. Holt's home was one of the old houses in this curiously foreign ancient town, with a sloping garden and the Channel quivering and shimmering a mile or so away. Mrs. Holt was in the garden, as I could see from the pleasant sitting-room window. I thought her a very comely and attractive figure as she stood by a rose bush, *sécateur* in hand. I watched the pretty little maid trip out to tell her of my presence and turned to the room itself. Most of it was hung with Piranesi engravings in very fine condition. Over the mantelpiece were two or three Rembrandt etchings, also perfect impressions.

It was a hot still day, and I tried to reconstruct the times, not so far distant, when the sea made Rye one of the Cinque Ports in verity.

Mrs. Holt came in, holding her gardening-gloves in her left hand and offering me the other. I saw

that she was a sweet, serene woman, probably in the middle forties. She had a very musical voice.

"I am a busybody," I said. "That is my only introduction."

"Oh, no," she replied. "Your introduction came some time ago, in a letter from Rose. But even if you are a busybody, you are not, I am sure, a very offensive example. The bad ones always are so eloquent in disclaiming any right to the title."

"Any friend of Rose's is a friend of ours," she went on. "I am not alone here, perhaps you know. My guardian—and Rose's guardian too, as it happens—Dr. Greville, shares the house. I'll call him."

"Before I explain?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. I should like him to hear too."

She rang the bell and bade the pretty little maid tell Dr. Greville that Mr. Beckett was here.

"You know where I met your daughter, of course?" I said.

"Yes," she replied. "The letter told me. At Moret."

I sighed with relief. I had had a horrid fear that Rose had not told. I was expecting Mrs. Holt to say Paris.

"You met her," Mrs. Holt continued, "with her friend, Mr. Muir, another artist, didn't you? They're working together."

Of course? How contemptible of me ever to have indulged the faintest suspicion that Rose would conceal anything! Concealment was not in her nature.

"Yes," I said. "I knew they were, but I didn't know for how long. Mr. Muir is my nephew."

"How very interesting!" Mrs. Holt exclaimed. "Dombeen," she cried, as a brisk white-haired professional-looking man entered the room, "Mr. Beckett

is Mr. Muir's uncle. Isn't that interesting? You know who I mean—Alistair Muir, Rose's artist friend."

Dr. Greville greeted me warmly. "Rose thinks the world of him," he said, "judging by her letters. They seem to be having a great time together."

I must say that they were making it very difficult for me, these two. If they, to whom she belonged, saw nothing unwise in such close association with Alistair, why should I?

"You don't think there is any danger?" I inquired, at last.

"Danger of what?" Mrs. Holt asked.

"Well, you don't fear scandal?"

"No one can prevent scandal," she said. "Scandal is so largely the affair of other people that it can hardly be guarded against. But Rose would do nothing wrong. She might be too impulsive, she might from the world's point of view be unwise, but she wouldn't do anything wrong."

"No, I don't think she would. Nothing at any rate that she thought was wrong," I said. "But every one is not as sensible and understanding as you. The knowledge of this very unconventional companionship might one day be injurious to her. You see, they were in the same house. They were under the same roof, night and day. You sanction that?"

"We are not exactly in a position to stop it," said her mother. "I personally should prefer her to be here. I want her and miss her. But Rose is her own mistress: she is of age and has her own money. We do the next best thing to having her with us—we trust her."

"Very well," I said. "That is all I wanted."

I felt rather foolish. "In a kind of way," I said, "I am being a sneak. But I am interested in my

nephew and I am interested in Rose, and I don't want her to be made unhappy by him. That is really the purpose of this visit—to ascertain her position. My wife would have been distressed if any of her flesh and blood took advantage of an impressionable girl's loyalties."

If they had any other idea for Rose's happiness, the sooner they withdrew her from France the better. She might marry Alistair against his will: win him through his sense of honour—but that is one of the least desirable stepping-stones to bliss and in this case should not be allowed. Such, vaguely, had been the thoughts behind my visit to Rye.

"You don't mind if she marries him?" I asked.

"We haven't seen him," said Mrs. Holt. "But Rose will do as she wishes. I can only repeat that we trust her."

"No one can be trusted not to make an indiscreet marriage," I said.

"Of course not," Mrs. Holt replied, flushing a little, I thought. "Marriages are made in Heaven. But she has hinted nothing in the nature of any emotional attachment to Mr. Muir. The alliance seems to be for work only."

"What would her friends say if they knew the conditions under which she was living at Moret?" I asked.

"Her friends," Dr. Greville replied, "would still be her friends; being her friends they know her and would understand."

"Then her enemies?" I suggested.

"What one's enemies say, can't matter. Being enemies they would never be fair, and what they said would never be evidence. Let us talk very plainly, Mr. Beckett. Rose, according to you, is compromising herself, whether she is purely and

simply your nephew's fellow-painter, his mistress or his betrothed—that is so, isn't it ? ”

I admitted it.

“ Well, our point is, that if she is his fellow-painter and comrade pure and simple, as I believe, there is no harm done. Not when we remember that both are artists and both are in France. Artists can do these things and live. Thank God for it ! say I. Artists are not like you and me. I, as a general practitioner in an English country district, would have been made to starve if I had so behaved. You—I don't know what your business is, Mr. Beckett, but you have all the appearance of respectability—you also would have been in danger. But if either of us had the genius to lure sunshine on to canvas—to put oil, so to speak, on nature's tail and capture her—as these young people have, we could have done what we liked, just as they are doing. We shouldn't have cared twopence what the big world said, because the only world that concerned us would be a little congenial, kindly, careless world, peopled by other artists with similar gifts and ambitions. Therefore, be easy in your mind about Rose, at any rate, even if you are worried about your nephew. If Rose is merely his fellow-painter and comrade, she may be indiscreet, but nothing more. Hypotheses two and three can go absolutely, because Rose would neither live with a man nor become engaged to a man, without first informing her mother or me of her intention.”

I stared.

“ It is true,” said the doctor. “ I know. Only one thing,” he continued, “ could keep Rose from telling one of us.”

“ Yes ? ” I said. “ And that is ? ”

“ If she were in love with your nephew and he

asked her to let it be a secret, she might not be frank about it. A woman would nearly always put her lover first. Is he that kind of man, do you think?"

"I know him very little," I replied. "But I should guess not. He seemed to me to have thoughts only for his work."

"But there are the evenings," said Dr. Greville, who seemed suddenly to have become the devil's advocate. "What is there to do, then? Evenings must be very long to artists."

"They are so keen," I said, "I think they hurry to sleep so as to be up the earlier."

"Well, if they are to marry," said the doctor, "it's a better preparation than most young people have, who usually see each other only under unnatural conditions."

"I hope you will be more easy in your mind now," said Mrs. Holt.

"I intend to be no less fatalistic than you and Dr. Greville," I said.

"And you will dine with us?" she asked. "We dine at eight. You are staying in Rye, of course."

I said I was at the George, and I would dine with them with pleasure.

And I did so, with pleasure.

They were a very understanding couple, and a deep affection seemed to subsist between them. The doctor must have been thirty years older than his ward, of whose position I longed to know more but obtained no inkling. She was placid, but her face denoted experience; a suggestion of wistfulness, as though past happiness still dominated her thoughts, was always present, even in laughter. I assumed her to be a widow.

It was very pretty to watch her solicitude for her old friend. Whether she welcomed a third person

I cannot say, but he, I am certain, would have been as pleased had they been alone.

I learned that Rose had been in the doctor's charge since she was seven, but how that can have happened—why the mother was not there too—was not explained. Their educational system was the same: to take all the precautions during the dependent years and then to trust to Fate. It sounds very simple, but there must be the right material.

In Rose, however, they had absolute faith.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH AN EPIGRAMMATIST GETS BUSY

ON the evening of my return from Rye, a telephone message was awaiting me, asking me to go round and see Mr. Giles, who was not well.

Herbert opened the door.

"He's not seriously ill?" I inquired.

"Oh no, sir. Just a touch of the old enemy, that's all. Gout, sir."

"Does it improve his temper?" I asked.

Herbert cast his eyes towards Heaven.

A bell suddenly started to ring and continued pitilessly.

"That's him," said Herbert. "I'll just see what he wants."

Through the door I could hear Giles's voice.

"What are you doin', sir?" he thundered. "Do you know, sir" (he always called Herbert "sir" when he was displeased with him. In fact, when on his high horse, he called every one sir. Waiters in particular.) "I've been ringin' for ten minutes. Where's the evenin' paper?"

"I put it beside you the last time I came in," Herbert replied meekly.

"You did nothin' of the kind, sir," Giles roared. "Go and get me another, and be quick about it."

"Isn't that the paper between you and the chair, sir?" I heard Herbert inquire.

"By Jove, so it is," I heard Giles reply, with less acerbity. "But goodness knows how it got there. Why didn't you give it to me properly? Very well, that's all."

"Please, sir," said Herbert, "Mr. Cavanagh is here."

"Mr. Cavanagh! Then why the devil didn't you say so?"

"I thought——" Herbert began.

"Thought! You've got no right to think. How dare you think, sir? I don't pay you to think. I pay you to do what I want, though Heaven knows you don't do it. Ask Mr. Beckett in at once."

Giles was seated before the fire, with one foot swaddled in flannel, on the opposite chair. Beside him was "Ruff's Guide" and he had the evening paper in his hand.

"Look at this," he said. "If that isn't the limit? Frankenstein—I. Now I've been followin' that pestilential animal all the season every time it was out until to-day. And it's done nothin'. Crawled in. This mornin' I vowed I'd drop it. And look at it, it comes in first at 100 to 8. If that isn't rotten luck I never heard of any."

"You told me you were giving up betting," I said.

"So I did—for a while," Giles replied. "But one must do somethin'. You wouldn't have me idle, would you? Any way I can afford it."

I said I was sorry he was seedy. "What does your doctor say?" I asked.

"Doctors," he growled. "What's the use of doctors? Revoltin' fellers. When you're my age you're your own doctor. What's the good of payin' a man three guineas to be told to give up somethin' you like. My idea of a doctor is a man you can

go to and say 'Look here, I want some medicine that will enable me to go on bein' just as self-indulgent as I am now, but will cure me.' That's what we all want and that's what medicine and doctors ought to be for. Givin' up things! I can do that myself, if I want to."

"Well," I said, "I can't stay now, because I'm dining out. But is there anything I can do? You don't seem to have any books. Let me send you some."

"No, thanks," said Giles. "I'm not a readin' man; and I've got 'Ruff' here."

"You'd better have a novel or two," I said. "I'll send some round. I couldn't live without something to read at night."

"At night," said Giles pompously, "I sleep."

"All the same," he continued, producing a slender paper-covered volume, "I've got a book here I don't suppose even you have seen, with all your subscriptions to the libraries. A feller at the club wrote it and gave me one. I never thought he had it in him. It's called 'Man's Oldest Foe,' and what do you think it's about?"

"Drink," I suggested.

"Don't be foolish," said Giles. "It's serious, not a joke."

"Well?" I asked.

"Woman," he said, with a ghastly laugh. "Listen to this:

"'Man is an inexperienced motorist in the Alps, and women are his hairpin turns.'

That's not bad, is it? I can't think how the feller thought of it. He's a dull dog when you meet him."

"Most writers of aphorisms are either thieves,"

I said, "or paraphrasers—which is the same thing."

"Here's another," said Giles:

"What a man means by getting his freedom, is merely liberty to entangle himself with another woman."

That's damned true. Here's another:

"One of the complications of life comes from the fact that whereas all girls are women, boys remain boys."

Isn't that so?"

"You're not much of a boy," I remarked.

"I'm an exception," said Giles proudly. "This kind of book always deals with generalities. But it's not entirely about women," he went on. "Here are some mixed ones:

"Having decided what our own virtues are, we are severe on all people who have not the same."

"Life would be intolerable if we couldn't discuss our friends behind their backs."

"A peer, no matter how he may be despised by his family, derided at his club and disregarded in the House of Lords, can always find company in which to recover his complacency."

"This is one I like," said Giles with a chuckle:

"Some men earn their living and some are racing-tipsters on the press."

"And what about these?"

"We are all, even the most scrupulously just, not quite fair to some one."

"There are two or three individuals with whom even the worst-tempered man is never cross."

"Loss of self-respect is a great simplification of life—except when one wakes in the small hours."

"The vice or foible that we least like in others (except perhaps our wives) is a want of generosity."

“‘Women should never be funny. Witty, maybe, but there is no necessity for it.’

“‘Champagne evaporates, but claret stands by.’

That’s true,” said Giles. “But one must give champagne her due. She starts one’s guests talking.”

He read on, with the laboriousness of a man unused to books:

“‘It requires a very large-minded wife to understand a husband’s admiration of his sisters.’

“‘The perfect woman is she in whose presence you can think aloud and who will never quote any of those thoughts against you.’

“‘After you have been married five years, there should always be some one to dinner.’”

Giles laughed at that. “I’ll bet that’s right,” he said: “I’ve been the some one so often.”

I got up to go.

“No, not yet, listen to this,” he said:

“‘The unsuspected are not suspected, but once they are suspected they are never unsuspected again.’

I expect there’s something in that,” Giles said meditatively. “But how did he know? He’s a deceivin feller, I’m afraid. Leads the double life. That’s double life stuff, if you like.”

“I really must go,” I urged.

“I insist on your hearing one more,” said Giles. “It’s above my head, but I have the feeling it’s good:

“‘Self-complacency is the supreme failure. Call no man dead till he is happy.’”

—“Extraordinary,” I heard him muttering as I walked away, “how he could have thought of those things! Damned secretive feller!”

CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH I PLAY THE MACHIAVELLI

I WAS intending to stay in England for the rest of the year, but bad news of Vaddy made a change of plan imperative.

He was ill in his chambers. Nothing organically wrong, but generally run down. His blood was out of order, he said.

I asked him what he thought was the cause, knowing only too well that it was drink.

Vaddy suggested everything else, even speculating on the probability of its resulting from all those years of overwork when he was a young man.

I said he must come to my house and be properly looked after there.

No, no, he liked his own place the best.

Then a Nursing Home?

No, no.

I saw his doctor and learned that alcoholism was the trouble. Too much whisky and too much tobacco combined. No exercise. Too little sleep. If he could be removed from his club habits he would have a chance.

And thus it came about that I went abroad, Vaddy having reluctantly promised to go with me. To Spain. It was the only country he wanted to see.

I should have chosen Italy myself, but it was Vaddy's affair, and the doctor approved, on the ground that Spanish wines were very wholesome.

"Also rather nasty," he added, "and that is a good thing, for he may come to prefer water. Spain has wonderful natural waters. Be sure to ask for 'Borines.'"

The idea of more foreign travel had not entered into my head ; but since it had to be, I was not sorry, for I should have a chance of seeing Alistair and Rose in Paris on the way.

I called on them after lunch on the morning after our arrival, the train for Irun not leaving till the evening.

Alistair was living in a set of three rooms on the second floor of an old house in the Rue Jacob—a house that now comprised a dozen *ménages* and three or four business offices too, but which a hundred and fifty years ago was a French aristocrat's town mansion.

Rose was his neighbour, sharing rooms with some girl students near by. I found her in his studio arranging flowers.

Alistair's *bonne* left every day after lunch. He dined in a restaurant and then went either to the Café Harcourt or the Café du Panthéon for coffee and picture talk. His slender means, still rigorously unreinforced by his father, just permitted this, with a margin for materials.

The studio was in the usual muddled state that one expects from artists—at any rate from those who are not R.A.s and fashionable. I love these litters ; the old sofas, the old hats, fellow artists' votive sketches hanging all crooked on the walls or propped up on the piano and mantelpiece ; the canvases with their backs to you, which you so long to investigate ; the empty frames ; the picture half done on the easel ; the picture three quarters done in the fireplace ; the old piece of porcelain that holds

the flowers ; the artist's working coat of many colours, some of which you find on your own superior garments when you get home.

And then there is the readiness of the artist to stop work and light another cigarette and fetch the bottle and the glasses—or, more often, to say, " Excuse me while I go and get something to drink ; I believe I'm out of it "—which gives you a chance to turn those canvases round !

This alacrity in breaking off their toil (which really is, of course, only play—for who can call setting delicious hues one against the other, re-creating blue skies and purple seas, work ?) is such a relief after one's ordinarily busy friends, who say, " Just a minute while I finish this letter," or " Do you mind waiting while I telephone ? " or " There's *The Times* : I shan't be more than twenty minutes. I'm sorry smoking isn't permitted here ! "

I don't say that Alistair was quite the perfect artist host, because he was worried and obviously tired and over-serious. But the litter was there and the place was full of his recent efforts, some of which struck me as being very beautiful.

I asked him if he had sold much.

" No," he said. " There's no call for anything so simple as I am. They want freak stuff just now. Anything with violent discords and no drawing in it, they're mad about. It beats me. But I'll do some of the painters the justice to say that they are honest. They are experimenting with definite ideas, feeling their way. But why their experiments should be shown and bought, I can't see. They ought to wait till they're ready before they exhibit. At least that's how I feel. I never offer anything to a dealer unless I have really worked at it and am satisfied with it.

"Of course I don't mean 'satisfied': that would be impossible," he added. "But unless I feel that it is done. But the fashion over here is for every sketch that can be found in a studio to be hung or put on the market."

"Muir will never get on," said a fellow artist, who dropped in at this moment and drew me aside. "He's out of date. And so young too, for it! Fancy being only twenty-three and deliberately painting like a back-number. The Barbizon men don't count for anything now. They had no imagination. What's the good of painting things as you see them? You might as well get a photograph. The new way is to paint their souls; and everything has a soul, even a brick wall. That's what Cezanne knew, and Van Gogh. They wore themselves out getting behind the scenes."

"Well," I said, "I'm not in a position to argue. I don't know. But after walking through a vast number of rooms at the Grand Palais this morning and looking in art dealers' windows in the Rue Boétie and elsewhere, I should have said that the new way of painting is not to care a hang for either drawing or beauty. If that is extracting the soul, well and good. But I am still for Corot."

Rose looked rather subdued, and I was glad when she suggested that she and I should walk down to the river to see Notre Dame from the garden of the little church of St. Julien Le Pauvre where she had been painting all the morning.

I said good-bye to Alistair and we descended the hill together.

"Well?" I asked, when we were established under St. Julien's ancient wall, with the cathedral rising before us, in the little plot of land that the priest tills.

"So you went to Rye," she said. "I heard about you. And how did they look?"

I said that Dr. Greville struck me as being rather frail.

"Yes," she said. "The dear. I'm afraid he is. I dread the winter for him."

"And when are you going back?" I asked.

"I don't know," she replied, rather sadly. "It depends . . ."

"On?"

"I can't say," she said. "As a matter of fact everything seems so uncertain . . ."

"May I talk to you like a father?" I asked.

"Like somebody else's father—yes. Please do," she said. "I'm not very fond of my own."

The present tense! So Mrs. Holt was not a widow! The thought surprised and vexed me; but why it should vex me, I can't say. Anyhow, my present concern was with Rose.

"Well," I said. "Lookers-on, you know, see most of the game."

"Yes?"

"You're very fond of Alistair, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am," she said.

"More than fond?" I asked. "Forgive me, but I'm being paternal. You love him?"

She admitted it.

"But you're not engaged?"

"No."

"And you don't know how he feels about you?"

"No. Except that I'm afraid he doesn't feel anything. If only he did! How I wish it, sometimes! He finds me useful, of course. He'd be disappointed if I didn't come in and be free to go out with him. I've become a sort of habit with him. But that isn't love, is it?"

"Love has declined upon that kind of thing," I said, "rather easily. It oughtn't to begin in that way."

"That's what I was thinking," she said. "But the fact that he doesn't seem to love me doesn't make it any more difficult for me to love him. I suppose it ought to. I suppose it's dreadful for me to love any one who doesn't love back. It ought to be humiliating to be just a companion, like a dog that's whistled to, but as a maffact I don't mind. I don't mind in the least."

"You could not, however, go on for ever like this," I said. "And suppose some other girl attracted him, what then?"

"Oh, I couldn't bear it," she said. "I'm horribly jealous. I used to think I had no jealousy in me; but now I suffer tortures from it."

"We never know anything about jealousy until we love," I said. "It's a measure of our devotion."

We sat silent for a while. My eyes were on the angels of Notre Dame ascending to the *flèche*, but I did not see them. I saw this girl slaving for a cold preoccupied husband: giving so much and receiving so little. She should have fallen to a more generous captor.

One thing was clear: he must be tested.

I took her hand.

"Look at me," I said. "You're not a coward, are you?"

"I hope not," she replied. "But probably I am."

"You could face facts, if they had to be? Even horrid ones?" I asked.

"I think I should try," she replied. "If they had to be."

"Well," I said, "if I were giving you my advice—which is useless, of course, because advice is never taken."

"Tell me," she said, her sweet face all earnestness and distress.

"Well, if I were giving you advice, it would be this. I should say, go away and leave Alistair to himself. Go back to your mother and that nice old doctor. And then see what happened. Could you?"

"But my work?" she exclaimed. "It's the middle of a session. Couldn't I stay here and not see him?"

"Could you?" I asked.

"No," she confessed.

"No," I said. "The only way is to go right off. But do it quickly. Can you?"

"I don't know," she said. "I'll see. I'll try. I will if I can. But, as a matter of fact, I don't see why I should."

"You needn't see," I said. "That's my affair. I'm giving advice, not reasons. But I said you wouldn't take it."

"It's such a wrench," she said. "And I don't know what they'll think of me at home. I don't give up things, you know. If I go I shall go back to Chelsea."

"And not weaken?" I asked.

"I can't promise anything," she said. "I may not go at all. I may go and stay. I may go and weaken. How can I tell?"

"But one thing you must say for certain," I insisted. "You must say that you believe my advice is meant for the best; for your truest happiness."

"Yes, I believe that," she said.

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH WAR AGAIN BREAKS OUT IN THE PENINSULA

GLANCING at Vaddy from time to time as we approached the frontier the next morning, I was conscious that he was not happy. He was thinking, I surmised, of his plight; failure (it cannot be called by a milder term) to keep his end up. The world had not beaten him; it would be too much to say that, for he had a clear head and a fit body when he gave them a chance; but unless he quickly did something strong-minded, beat him it would. And, without sufficient incentive, why should he do anything strong-minded? Why should he not amiably drift and be pitied and popular?

My reading of his thoughts was proved to be accurate by Vaddy suddenly asking me a question.

"Why should other fellows," he asked querulously, "be able to take every liberty with their health and never turn a hair, while I am shaky and depressed? It's a damned shame. Most unfair. But I suppose," he went on, "it's because I worked so hard when I was young. Look at old Fellingham—he hasn't been really sober for years and he's as fit as a fiddle. Why? Most unfair."

"We're all different," was the only reply that I could think of. I suppose I have said it several thousands of times before.

When we reached Irun about nine in the morning,

we found ourselves in a difficulty. The next train for Madrid was full. That is to say, every seat in it was already engaged, although actually it was empty. The seats, we were told, were to be occupied by passengers getting in at San Sebastian, half an hour distant, the season there being near its end and all the butterflies flying south.

I had endeavoured to book places right through, but the ticket agents said that it was impossible. Why, I cannot imagine, except as a manifestation of the principle "Spain for the Spanish."

Vaddy was almost maniacal, but I did my best to quieten him. I told him of a remark of the clerk in London, that on a Spanish railway anything can be done by bribery. "Even the directors," he had said, "are susceptible"; but I can assure you either that Irun is an exceptional spot or the statement is a calumny.

I passed from official to official, from the Jefe de Stacione downwards, with my pocket-book in hand; but in vain. The answer was always the same: there was no place!

I tried both cajolery and reason. In England, I said, another carriage would be attached. Was that not possible here?

No suggestion more laughably impracticable could ever have been made.

Then what must we do?

Wait for the next train.

To an Englishman, accustomed to the sympathetic laxity of railway servants and the courtesy and resourcefulness of guards with concave palms followed by God for the reception of half-crowns, a train full of vacant seats—and not only vacant but without any visible indication that they have been reserved—which, although he has a first-class through ticket,

he may not sit in, is one of the most infuriating spectacles in life. All the blood rushes to his head ; all his reserves of indignation and scorn are loosened ; every write-to-*The-Times* impulse in his system surges to the top. No wonder that Vaddy, who was in a nervous condition any way, began to be very English indeed !

"Do you mean to tell me," he shouted, in boiling French, to one of the attendants, "that there is not a single unreserved seat in this immense train ?"

The man stated that that was the case.

"Then show me the reserved labels," said Vaddy, as though he were a Commander-in-Chief.

The man offered no explanation. The train, he said, was *loué*. If we wanted to know more we must inquire at the *guichet*.

"*Guichet* be damned !" said Vaddy. "If I settle myself here, in this seat, what then ?" he demanded Rule-Britannically.

"At San Sebastian," said the man, "you will be ejected in favour of the gentleman who has reserved it."

"Come away," I said. "It's an infernal nuisance : but it's perfectly logical. They are idiots not to try to help us at all, as they would at Euston or St. Pancras, but if the train's full, it's full. We can hang about Irun till the next one starts."

"My dear Cavanagh," Vaddy replied, full of dignity and firmness, "that's absurd. We are due in Madrid this evening. We have our hotel waiting for us. We are English and we have an Ambassador over here. The whole thing is a swindle and it should be resisted."

He marched up to the Jefe de Stacione and produced his ticket and his passport.

"We are due in Madrid to-night," he said. "You must find us seats."

The Jefe, who was one of those terrifying foreign officials—a man in an iron mask—shrugged his shoulders and, saying that it was impossible, walked away.

“Very well,” said Vaddy, “we will get into a second-class carriage. They are not engaged.”

And he led the way to a second. It was very uncomfortable, with hard wooden seats and no room for the legs, but he established himself in it and I meekly followed.

“But, my dear fellow,” I said, “we can’t spend twelve hours in a chicken coop like this. We shall be worn out.”

“It’s all right,” he said. “A day soon goes. We’ll look out of the window at the scenery, all new and strange; read; have lunch. These beggars must be beaten.”

At that moment an official came up and asked to see our tickets. He looked at them and returned them, saying “These are first-class tickets. It is forbidden to travel second-class with first-class tickets. Besides, the places are reserved.”

Another blow to an Englishman, in whose land the practice of travelling first with a third-class ticket is almost the only industry left.

“The gentlemen will please alight.” The official was the soul of courtesy, but beneath the velvet glove I was conscious of a glint of steel.

No, said Vaddy, we would not alight. It was obvious that the whole thing was a conspiracy against us. Seats that were reserved had labels to that effect, and here there were none. To travel second with a first-class ticket was to confer a favour on the railway company. We should remain.

“My dear Vaddy,” I said again, “don’t be an ass. They’re bound to win, and then what shall we look like?”

"I don't think so," he said. "They daren't touch us. All we've got to do is to refuse to move, and they're done. They daren't touch Englishmen. Why, their Queen's English. They love us."

If ever an Englishman looked difficult to love, it was Vaddy at that moment.

"They love us," he repeated. "Spain is the one country—with the possible exception of Italy—where we are really loved."

At this moment a formidable array of men entered the corridor and clustered in the doorway of the compartment. First, the ticket collector, then the Jefe and sub-Jefe, then a man in plain clothes with a long lean face, and then two soldiers.

I held my peace, but the thought that we were about to learn how love can be dissembled crossed my mind.

"Whatever you do," said Vaddy to me, "don't move."

As Vaddy was between me and a doorway filled with officialdom, I could hardly abandon him now; but I wished we were well out of it.

"May I see your tickets," said the sub-Jefe, sweetly.

"That official had just seen them," said Vaddy, pointing to the collector, and adding to me, "Don't show yours whatever you do. It's a trick to get them away from us, and then, of course, we're done."

"May *I* see your tickets?" said the sub-Jefe again.

Vaddy repeated his first remark.

"Very well then, show *me* your tickets," said the man in plain clothes, thrusting a long lean face, distorted with passion, into Vaddy's.

"What's it got to do with you?" said Vaddy, in a state of fury. "Certainly not."

At this, the man in plain clothes became livid and flung open his coat, revealing a badge inside, as in American crook plays on the film.

He shook his lapel and repeated his demand to see the tickets.

"Show him," I said. "He's a policeman. Whatever you do, don't defy the police. That is always a mistake."

But Vaddy was beyond sense.

"We have shown them already," he repeated, in the same class-room French, but molten, "to the proper person. That fellow there! We're British subjects and don't you forget it!" And again he brandished his passport. "I will report this to our Ambassador in Madrid."

A terrific argument between the officials then set in, in Spanish. The station officials, I fancy, were for diplomacy, but the policeman, who was stung by resistance, for revenge. The policeman won.

"Take out their luggage," said the sub-Jefe to our porter, who had been hanging about behind, and the poor fellow (whose sympathies, I believe, were entirely with us) stepped forward to do so; when Vaddy pushed him violently away.

This foolish gesture was the signal for action.

The man in plain clothes, now beside himself with rage, gave an order to the two soldiers, and in a moment Vaddy had their hands on his shoulders and was being forcibly removed to the platform.

I was terrified for the result: but from this point he behaved admirably. His anger suddenly gave way to a calm contempt. He knew that he was beaten, and he intended to fight no more. I must say I admired him very much, although at the same time I was vexed enough with him for dragging me into this ridiculous position, for I was now one of a pro-

cession, the delight of every person on the platform or in the train, marching solemnly towards the police station on the other side.

Along the platform we went, Vaddy and his captors in the van and I in the rear, down the stairs, under the line, up again, with all the passengers hastening over to the near windows, and so to the room where the head police official sat in state.

What would have happened to us, I cannot think, had it not been for the arrival of a new man in plain clothes, who asked what had occurred. A heated conversation between him and the others followed, in which the word prison was far too prominent, but in which the new arrival obviously was acting as a peacemaker. And then the fateful inspector at the desk delivered a lecture in French, in which the enormity of defying the police was continually mentioned. For that was our worst offence. It was not for laying hands on the porter; it was not even for being in a second-class carriage with a first-class ticket; it was for refusing to obey a police order.

And so, with a warning, we were allowed to depart.

Meanwhile, the train had departed too, and there, all forlorn, on the deserted platform opposite, was such of our luggage as was not registered through—and fortunately it was enough for a few days' comfort.

An inauspicious beginning of the Spanish adventure, indeed! To be arrested before we had been an hour on the soil of the land where "the point was first set upon honour," the land of that noble gentleman who rode from La Mancha to redress abuses!

But it was both our first and last calamity, and, like so many a *faux pas*, it led to benefits. But for it, for example, we should never have seen San Sebastian; but for it, we should never have known how charming a Spanish railway official can be immediately after

he has been offensive. For, now that the incident was closed, the Jefe, and the sub-Jefe, and the ticket collector (all, in fact, but the police officer) gathered round us smilingly to know how they could be of service. And it was by the advice of the Jefe, his iron mask now laid aside, that, after breakfast in the station restaurant, we went off to San Sebastian and were idle and frivolous during three days of delicious warmth—no doubt (if there is any symmetry in Heaven) occupying the very rooms that had been vacated by the two persons whose reserved seats for Madrid we had so coveted.

Such is life !

San Sebastian, as a matter of fact, did more to restore Vaddy to health than any place we could have found ; for it gave him the sea to swim in, and music in the Casino to soothe him, and, for amusement, we watched all the gay Spanish throng, from the officers with their shameless ogling of the fair (who are really dark), to the magnificent *nourrices* in full sail, with their big pearl earrings, who nurse their olive-skinned charges with such publicity and pride in the avenue of tamarisks.

Such unimaginative treatment as we received at Irun—and I heard afterwards that the spectacle of foreigners stamping and ramping up and down the platform there, because they cannot find seats in the Madrid express, is an almost diurnal joy—is not the rule in Spain. In fact we never met with it again ; but none the less the Englishman does not have to be in the country very long before realizing that it can get on very well without him. In France we are not deeply popular, but the French can, if they will, put forward a very fair imitation of true hospitality. But in Spain there is no interest in pretence : the Spaniard is too lethargic and careless to go to the

trouble of being insincere. There is no more ambition in Spain than in Southern Ireland ; but it amuses the Irish people to flatter the stranger, whereas the Spaniard wouldn't be bothered even to try.

One moves about, a tolerated alien. All that one has to do is to be scrupulous not to get between the Spaniard and the sun. That he would not forgive.

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH TWO GENTLEMEN STUDY IBERIA

VADDY'S promise of rich and beguiling scenery on the way to Madrid was not fulfilled. For a long while the train winds between mountains, with here and there a village or town clinging to the sides, here and there a river half full of stones. And then comes the desert—leagues of arid earth and grey rock and few signs of life. Some goats here; a mule and its rider—often a mule and its two riders—there. One is perplexed as to how the people live at all. Farther south there are pastures; but one has to travel hundreds of miles to find them. Even Madrid is surrounded by sandy plains.

Madrid is the noisiest city I have been in. All Latin people seem to be indifferent to noise, but the Spaniards are less disturbed by it than any. Their tram wheels scream in a way that none others can accomplish. Their horses' hoofs emit a more shattering din. One sees in Spain no gentle sights, one hears no half tones.

One result of Madrid's cacophonies was to send me more and more to the Prado. And here I may say that Madrid is an excellent place in which to be a tripper, because it is not hot and no one lunches till two. Between breakfast and two one can see so much, and I was in the Prado every morning when the light was at its best. I was alone, because Vaddy does not care for pictures; but he was happy enough

among a number of open-air old bookstalls that had caught his eye as we came from the station and in which, after he had succeeded in finding them, he spent hours.

I don't think I have ever enjoyed any picture gallery so much as the Prado. Its opulence is so striking. Where other collections have two or three Titians, the Prado has a score. And then a score of Tintoretos and Veroneses ; Rubens and Van Dycks uncountable ; a whole vast room of Murillos ; several rooms devoted to Goya ; a little room wholly Raphael's ; Rembrandt's magnificent " Queen Artemisia " ; and thousands of other works upstairs, downstairs and on the ground floor—enough to make the reputation of a hundred provincial museums.

My feeling in Madrid was that I would rather sit before Velasquez' " Las Meninas " than read any page ever written. And when I wanted a change I moved to another seat opposite the " Surrender of Breda," or to another opposite " The Tapestry Weavers," or to another opposite " Los Borrachos," that glorious group of wayfarers at rest.

Madrid, to me, will always mean, first and last, Velasquez. Two other Spanish artists does one find in the Prado at their best—Murillo and Goya—but if the question were asked, " Would you keep all that Murillo and Goya ever did and lose the ' Meninas ' ? " my answer would be that I would keep the " Meninas." This does not disparage the Sevillian's sweet Madonnas or the sophistications and grotesqueries of that subtle manipulator of brushes who once challenged the Duke of Wellington to a duel : it merely enunciates the superlative aristocracy of the art of Don Diego Velasquez.

Spain is not only very foreign, but a land of the past, and therefore doubly strange. In Provence, in Italy

and in Germany you find medievalism in full flower, but there is always modernity round the corner. Rothenburg, for example, that flower of the middle ages, is lighted wholly by electricity. But in Spain the sense of the past can be complete. Madrid is, of course, modern enough, but then Madrid is the capital, flaunting its borrowed plumes. It has boulevards, trams, cinemas, vast hotels, all the outward signs of civilization. Yet in ten minutes from Madrid you can be among mules and muleteers, strings of donkeys carrying merchandise, peasants sleeping in the shade of ancient houses crumbling in the sun.

This antiquity is not Spain's only surprise. For a country with such a reputation for privileged nobility, its democratic character is remarkable. One of the first things to be noticed in Spain is that, for all its royal glories, it is republican. *Hidalgos* may lay claim to streams of blue blood coursing through their families' veins for centuries, but they appear to receive no preferential treatment. One man is as good as another and every man insists on his rights. Even the poorest will tell you to take it or leave it.

Yet, though all Spaniards are, so to speak, on their dignity, one is struck by their want of style. The standard of dress is low; one discerns no interest in others, no imagination, and the people's manners are bad. Like all Latins they stare intolerably. Sloth and apathy are evident everywhere.

None the less, Spain has its lessons for England. It knows what to do with vegetables; it knows how to cook; its oil is delicious. Its use of pack animals is very sensible, and it is the only country where I have seen the problem of passenger traffic in the rush hours properly handled. Every one knows what our London tube stations are like, with people getting into a train and out of it at the same time. At a

little steam tram station in Spain I found the platform divided into two halves by a barrier. The tram remained on one side of this barrier until all its passengers who wished to alight had done so ; it then moved on a few yards and let the new ones in. It seemed odd to find so simple a solution practised in this land of ancient customs, and not even considered in London, where we are notoriously so civilized.

Spain is a land of rivers, rocks and bridges, and the best bridge that we saw was at Toledo, that city on a hill, with the Tagus at its base and the narrowest streets in the whole country. Never shall I forget the persistency of the youth of Toledo, whose principal occupation seems to be to waylay the tourist and exhibit the sights to him. We were followed by some thirty or forty of these boys, each more persistent than the other and each armed with better credentials. To see a cathedral in the company of a professional guide, even when he is a grown man with something authoritative to say, is distasteful ; but to be led round by a guttersnipe is absurdly impossible. It would, however, appear to be a Toledo custom, or these little ruffians would not exist. Most of them in time gave up the struggle, but two pests continued at our side until, in spite of the sanctity of the building, Vaddy took his stick to them and they fled. (Not however, that sanctity is unduly noticeable in a Spanish cathedral. There was more laxity and skylarking among the acolytes during a high ceremonial in Seville than I should have thought even the tolerant Catholic church in that most tolerant and easy-going city would permit.)

Toledo cathedral may deserve its epithet " rich "—from the old saying, " Toledo the rich, Salamanca the strong, Leon the lovely, Oviedo the holy, and Seville the great "—but it is too confused a building to be

beautiful. Interesting, impressive and unforgettable, but not beautiful, and hemmed in by surrounding houses, almost as though imprisoned. What one remembers best of Toledo, is Toledo itself massed on its rock, and the famous bridge. I think this is the most exciting and romantic bridge that I have seen, and bridges are a particular delight to me.

Toledo is famous also for the house of El Greco, but this Vaddy flatly refused to enter. One should not, he held, encourage the distorted melodramatic art of Domenico Theotocopuli.

It is one of the drawbacks of travelling with a companion (that is to say, after the honeymoon, with which most people's foreign wanderings begin and many people's end) that there is bound to be a divergence of opinion. In Madrid, for example, Vaddy could not bear that odd little restaurant, the Antigua Casa de Botin, where roast sucking pig (*cochinillo*) is a daily dish, and a popular speciality is a wonderful Spanish fish called Besugo al horno, a terrifying creature until you taste it; but I would rather have eaten there, in ancient Spain, than anywhere. And again, in Seville he wanted to be at the Opera all the time, while I preferred the more primitive and indigenous entertainment at the Novedades, the music hall, where the Quadro Flamenco is at its most riotous.

As we moved about, we learned again that one of the most important things to discard at the frontier, if one is to be happy in Spain, is our national tendency to impatience. Impatience and Spain have nothing in common. That perhaps is why it would be so good for many English people to travel there: it would be salutary to their characters and it would make them value their own privileged country the more.

Spain is also a salutary country for any one too much given to fleshpots, for the food is simple and not

too plentiful and there is nothing very strong to drink. I could see Vaddy improving day by day. Nor was he harmed by developing a passion for little green figs. Whenever I suddenly missed him in the street I knew that he had stepped into a fruiterer's for a bag of them.

As you travel from Madrid to Seville, you pass through outposts of the East : Moorish villages where the roofs are flat, palm trees and cactuses beside the line. You now see real vegetation too, Andalusia being rich and fruitful, and you have the thrill of crossing and re-crossing that river of dreams begotten of geography books—the Guadalquivir. Somehow I had never thought to see the Guadalquivir in reality, yet here it was, not so different from any other stream, and it accompanied us for miles to Seville, where it becomes more than a river—a haven—with big sea-going vessels on its tide.

The train passes also a most romantic isolated fortress castle, high on a solitary peak, and soon after this a great farm where young bulls destined for the arena looked at us across the fence and shook their great shaggy horned heads.

It may have been one of these identical creatures that I saw pierced by the toreador's rapier in the vast ring at Seville a few days later. One only, for I could not endure any more. But Vaddy, who is made of sterner stuff or has a more scientific attitude, watched no fewer than eighteen fall—six each afternoon for three days.

"I'm sorry," I said, at the end of the first fight, "but I must go. This is too degrading."

"All right," he said. "I shall sit on. I find it thrilling."

"But the way those wretched horses were gored to death," I said.

"Yes, that's not playing the game," he admitted ; "but one can cover one's eyes. The tactics of the men are most interesting."

I said I couldn't agree ; nor can I now, after hearing quite a number of eloquent upholders of Spain's national sport.

I cannot agree that any contest is good to see when the animal has no chance. Cock-fighting is condemned as cruel and is no longer permitted in England ; but I consider cock-fighting a gentlemanly entertainment compared with bull-fighting. The cocks are spoiling to get at each other and they die like heroes in the ecstasy of combat. But bull-fighting is one-sided : the odds are all on the men ; while the treatment of the horses is so despicable as to be beyond argument. Indeed the only defence I have heard of it, even from the most energetic friends of the ring, is that the animals are so old that they would have to die almost directly, anyway. But that hardly exonerates the spectators, and even a very old horse might be allowed to retain its bowels.

No, I saw no skill on the part of matador, capeador or toreador to set against the vile horror of the tortured horses.

Vaddy, however, while deploring this feature, differed. He thought that the agility and address of the performance were remarkable enough to justify the whole spectacle, and as his opinion was shared each day by fourteen thousand persons it certainly had weight.

An Englishman whom I met in a café in the Sierpes, went so far as to say that the blood-lust grows on one.

"I felt as you did when I saw my first bull-fight," he said. "But afterwards I became as keen as any-one to see the horses gored."

"Good God !" I exclaimed.

"It's true," he said. "And I'm a humane enough fellow. I daresay you would find it so too."

"I'll not take the chance," I replied. "But even if I did, and succumbed to the fascination, and found it defensible, I hope I should be in doubt then about myself."

"Well," he said, "don't condemn Spain as a nation just because of that."

"I won't," I said. "I'm condemning nobody. But I can't forget that a merciful man is merciful to his beast, and it causes a little disquietude to see fourteen thousand people—men, women and children—exulting in mercilessness and making a holiday of it."

And there we left it.

Seville is a city apart, and it is the nearest place to London where you meet the Orient. Madrid is cosmopolitan and modern: Seville, a night's journey away, is eastern. Oranges grow in the squares, and the heat of summer and early autumn is intense; even in October every house is shuttered for three or four hours during the siesta. It is thus a perfect abode for any one needing repose and willing to acquiesce. You must not carry thither any rigid purpose, any definite plan; you must make your mind a blank and let the city control you.

To go to Seville and propose to live as you live at home is folly. To go there bent upon sight-seeing is folly. Sights you will see, but they must occur; you must not seek them with a guide-book, partly because that is not the way, and partly because there is so little opportunity: the sun is against you. By the time it is cool enough it will be dark.

If the Prado were in Seville nobody would ever visit it. The conditions are all against picture-lovers there, although, as a matter of fact, there is an old monastery turned into a museum where there are a

number of beautiful Murillos, including the picture of St. Thomas distributing alms, which he called his masterpiece.

Seville is itself a gallery. You drift about the streets, in the shade, looking at the sun on the wall, making way for mules with their loaded panniers, peering into gay little patios behind their iron grills, smiling at women, all a little too billowy, at the windows. Or you sit in a café in the Sierpes, or street of the Serpents, where no vehicles are permitted, and watch the endless crowd.

Many of the men, save for their dark skin, might be mixed in a London crowd and escape notice, but now and then will come a Sevillian of the Sevillians, full of Flamenco defiance, whose black hat has a brim like a cycle track. But perhaps the most noticeable passers-by are the young girls with their mothers. These couples are a constant sight—the girl so youthful and pretty, the mother so shrivelled and careworn. Another sign of the East, this premature ageing.

Perhaps you gather enough strength to walk as far as the cathedral, knowing that once there it will be dark and cool : a cathedral that is also a thoroughfare. Gautier in his famous notes on Spain compared it to a mammoth elephant dominating the city, but since Gautier's time the dome has fallen in and it is now lower, the lovely minaret, the Giralda with her musical bells, being to-day the principal landmark from a distance. The cathedral is vast and emptier than any that I can recall, for there are seats only in the choir, in the centre. All else is open, so that nothing interferes with the rich coloured light which the sunbeams carry from the stained-glass windows to spread fantastically on the pavement.

As a whole Seville cathedral is also darker than any I can recall—Westminster Abbey, for example,

being like day itself compared with it. One would not have it lighter, were it anywhere ; but in Seville, with the sun so fierce, it is indeed a sanctuary.

Late in the afternoon we used to wander into the gardens of the Alcazar, that delicious Moorish palace close to the cathedral, and here we would watch the children at play, and listen to the birds preparing for the night, in the midst of perfume and colour. Here are nothing but formal walks and flowers ; no lawns. Oranges by the million, and heavily scented tuberoses and jasmine. Over the high wall a purple bougainvillea sprawled.

The Sevillians do not come this way at all. At this hour they are busy, the principal shopping being done between five and seven ; and we had the groves and terraces and fish-ponds almost to ourselves. But try as we might (each longing to see the other fall a victim) we never came upon any of the *giocchi* which Baedeker mentions : practical jokes such as Winstanley, the builder of one of the Eddystone lighthouses, devised in his Essex home to perplex his guests and amuse himself. Approaching a fountain you stepped inadvertently on a certain spot and released a spring which propelled you into the basin. Leaning on a railing you set in motion a jet of water, which drenched you. Innocent-looking seats collapsed and let you heavily down. Such pranks once were a feature of the gardens of the Alcazar, but either they have been suppressed or Vaddy was fortunate enough never to alight upon the machinery.

Seville, some one had said to me, is a place where you stay either a fortnight or for ever, and since I had no wish to stay there for ever, I dragged Vaddy away, and we came north again, with just one more day for the Prado *en route*. And so homewards, changing at Hendaye into a Paris express.

We slept till eight and then sat in the breakfast car looking at the fair land of France, so different in its trim prosperity and flatness from the mountains and desert through which we had been travelling all the day before.

A party of English children who had been summering at San Sebastian were on the train, and their delight in exploring it from end to end was intense.

"What a jolly present for a family one of these *wagons lits* would make!" I said to Vaddy. "A compartment for every child, to live in and decorate just as he liked. I can think of nothing more exciting."

And Vaddy agreed.

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH WE FIND A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

I DON'T pretend that I had moved about in Spain or indulged in the endless siestas that the heat forced upon us without thinking a good deal of home affairs, and perhaps most of all of Rose.

What, I wondered, had she done.

That I had been right in counselling her to put the salt leagues of the Channel between herself and her self-centred idol, I was convinced. Right, that is, if the dignity of a girl in love matters. But if her dignity was nothing to her compared with happiness (as is possible), why then I had interfered crassly. Probably she had never thanked me for considering it. She would rather stay and be humbled than go away and be deprived of her humbler's society.

I might also have been wrong about Alistair. There is no doubt that many artists are made no happier by marriage. The way for women to make them happy is to let them know they exist and have no other purpose in life than, when they are wanted, to be on hand, in a good temper, looking pretty and unoccupied, and full of sympathy and praise. The trouble with artists' wives is that they can't always be in a good temper, can't always look pretty, can't always be free, often don't feel the least inclination to praise or comfort, have to be supported, and—and

this is their crowning disability—are there when they're not wanted, too. Artists hate that.

But was Alistair quite such an artist? His willingness to give up comforts; his dogged determination to succeed; his fidelity to what so many of his contemporaries thought a lost cause—all this suggested a depth of character not always conspicuous in members of his craft. His preoccupation with beauty was also deep. He could not be more widely removed from those painters whose principal interest in Art is the charter it gives them to engage models.

If Rose were to lose Alistair through my intervention—my astuteness over-reaching itself—a calamity might result, and Heaven knows I did not want that.

It might be that, once his present mental absorption was finished with, Alistair would develop into the perfect lover. Pigment's problems must some day give way to those of sex. . . .

I had asked Rose to write to me in Spain saying what had happened. But no letter had come. This might be due to the laxity of the Spanish postal arrangements; it might be due to Rose's unwillingness to admit that she had failed. She might have found it impossible to leave Paris; she might have left and returned again. Or Alistair, suddenly awakening to his glorious good fortune, may have placed himself at her feet. . . .

No wonder then that my first step on reaching Paris was to take a taxi to the Rue Jacob, leaving Vaddy to convey our things to the hotel. The Rue Jacob is not far from the Quai d'Orsay and the cabman took the journey as only a Paris chauffeur can; he hooted, he swerved, he avoided our own death and other people's a dozen times, he bounded and he leapt; but none the less, and as usual, although every nerve of me was stretched and most of my body bruised, he deposited

me safely at the journey's end. It was noon and Alistair was on the point of going out. The room was in disorder, with half-packed bags scattered about, and I noticed no new pictures. I thought that Alistair looked worn and thin.

He expressed his readiness to eat with me and we descended the hill to the restaurant Lapérouse, on the river, where we could be both quiet and gluttonous.

It was lucky I had come to-day, he said. He was leaving to-night on a sketching tour in Provence. He was unsettled and wanted to get away among new surroundings. He might go to Aix and see what the Cezanne country was like.

I asked after Miss Holt.

She had gone back to England, he said.

I conjectured that he must miss her.

He said he did and changed the subject.

How did the case stand? I wondered. Certainly he was a very good-looking fellow: I was not surprised that Rose should want him. Was my scheme a good one? A little isolation could do neither of them any harm. There was no doubt that he looked unhappy.

What would he think if he knew the part I was playing as a match-maker? Or was I a match-marrer? . . .

We parted after lunch, and as I walked to the hotel, over the little footbridge opposite the Institut, I decided to do something which had long been in my mind. I would definitely award a little of Genevra's money to Alistair. In his present lonely state it might be of critical help to him. Genevra had been devoted to pictures, although her taste might very likely have provoked Alistair, and even Rose, to derision, or at any rate disapproval. I felt that the encouragement of an honest young painter, even though he was not

quite of the Landseer school, would not be against her conscience. Also, she had been very fond of Alistair's mother, whatever her feelings may have been towards Hugo. She had stood in the relation of a good aunt to the children all their life.

If she had not been too accessible to them—if the post-office had been their principal medium of communication—that was certainly less her fault than mine, for I had probably been the kind of husband who, having secured preferential treatment, never lets it go ; and, to be fair to myself, I must add that Genevra was the kind of childless wife who is happier in devoting herself to her husband than in any other way. And (as a rule) to what a husband !

The result was that we had gradually come to wonder if youthful visitors might not give more trouble than pleasure. People are not unapt to let that sort of selfishness grow on them.

Here, however, was a means of making up for it. I had the power now of giving Alistair something substantial in his aunt's name. Posthumous reparation.

In spite of Giles's cold water, I wrote to Alistair—he had given me a *poste restante*—in these terms :

DEAR ALISTAIR,—

I am glad I have seen you at work. I like your style of painting immensely and believe in it. It seems to me that you have a real future. You are sincere in your desire to master your art, you are frugal in habits and are prepared to be even uncomfortable if need be.

But I do not wish that for you, and I am in a position to help you to avoid it. Your aunt Genevra left a sum of money which she wished me to apply to the advancement of those of her nephews and nieces who seemed to me, on personal investigation, to deserve

it. I have come to the conclusion that you are eminently qualified to be one of the recipients, and I am therefore asking you to accept for the next five years an annual sum of two hundred and eight pounds. If you will let me have a reply to this I will make the necessary arrangements with the bank.

I am,

Yours sincerely,

CAVANAGH BECKETT.

I had to wait for a few days for the reply and when it came I was amazed.

DEAR UNCLE CAV,—

I have to thank you for a very kind letter, and to express my gratitude to Aunt Genevra. But I cannot accept. I should not dare to. I believe so strongly that money must be earned, and that money that is not earned is a danger. I have set my heart on living by my painting; and to take Aunt Genevra's money would not only spoil that dream now, but deprive me of any satisfaction if, and when, I make a position. Forgive me, but that's that.

Yours sincerely,

ALISTAIR MUIR.

I forget if I answered the letter. I hope I did. I know I admired it, marvelling at such independence and envying the young gladiator too.

I told Giles of Alistair's refusal.

"He's a silly ass," said Giles. "No one should refuse money. Money is power. And what is your next step in this wild-goose chase?"

"I don't know," I said. "There's a poet in the family that I ought to see. Alistair asked me to look

him up. You would be equally against the encouragement of him, I suppose?"

"More so," he said, "unless he did something respectable after his poetizin' was done. What do you think I did this afternoon?" he asked.

"Backed a winner," I said.

"Yes, but what else?"

"Had a Turkish bath," I suggested.

"No," he said, "certainly not. They don't suit me. No, I called on a lady."

"I'm glad to hear it," I said. "A little more feminine society would be good for you."

"Maybe," said Giles. "But feminine society is a dangerous matter. Sometimes you can't keep it to a little. Don't you want to know who it was? A friend of yours."

"Not Judy Hill?"

"No, I haven't seen her for years."

"Well, tell me."

"That little Mrs. Lethbridge," said Giles.

I laughed. "Was my account of her so attractive?" I inquired.

"I thought I'd like to see one of these new garage apartments," he replied. "So many people have them now. Besides, she was a nice child. I remembered all about her at Lymington after you told me."

"Well?" I asked.

"Now what I want to know is," said Giles, in his most exacting tones, "what is the matter with the world? What kind of a man is this husband of hers, that he can go off shootin' wild beasts in Africa when he's got a wife like that waitin' for him?"

"But she's not waiting for him," I said. "The whole point of it is that she is bored by him."

"Well, then," said Giles, "put it the other way. What kind of a man is he to let her be bored by him?"

What's the matter with young men that they should be bores? I'm not a bore; why should they be? I very much doubt if you're a bore: at any rate not a deadly one. I don't believe girls talked about their husbands bein' bores when I was a two-year-old. They married 'em and stuck to 'em. What does it all mean?

"And husbands too," he continued. "They married the girls and stuck to 'em and didn't go off to shoot hartebeests and hippopotamuses. I can't make it out. Now, there's that girl—she's as pretty as paint. If I were the kind of feller that does these things I could make a fool of myself over her. Luckily perhaps, I'm not. But I could. What kind of a life does she lead, do you suppose?"

"From what she told me," I said, "she just vegetates. She doesn't want men. You ought to be able to understand it, because you don't want women, or say you don't."

"No, but then I've come through all that. There was a time. . . . Not that I couldn't marry to-day if I wanted to. Just by holdin' up my finger, too. You see, she's so young. Not that I look upon myself as old. Fifty-five is the prime of life: one's just beginnin'. But my theory is that every woman wants a man, really. If they say they don't, it's pretence. Or they've been readin' so many novels about themselves and their emotions that they're muddled. Herbert packed three or four novels in my bag when I went to Monte Carlo last January and I tell you I was shocked by 'em. Shocked. Nothin' but analysin' sex. They made me blush. No fun, no jokes, no excitement; just the natural history of adultery. Good Lord, what are we comin' to?"

"That feller at the club whose book I was showin' you—nasty cynical stuff—he tells me it's the War that's

done it. The War, he says, made people, and especially young people, self-conscious. They used to do more or less what was expected of them ; but the War made 'em ask ' Why should we do what is expected of us ? Why shouldn't we do what we like ? ' And now they're all doin' what they like. It's appallin'."

He was silent for a while.

" If you take my advice," he went on, " you'll either sell your house or marry again. You can't have it both ways ; you can't go on livin' in a big house and bein' alone. All men in big houses marry again. Besides, why not ? You're quite young, you're only just over fifty."

" You seem to forget," I said, " that Genevra died less than eight months ago, and I happen to have been rather fond of her."

" I don't forget it," Giles said. " But it's got nothin' to do with the case. It's the men who were fond of their wives who *do* re-marry. Those who hated their wives don't dare to try again ; they've had some."

" My dear Giles," I said, " for a bachelor, and an anti-social one at that, you know too much."

He smiled his self-satisfied smile.

" But what you don't sufficiently appreciate," I went on, " are the exceptions."

" Exceptions," he said. " Pooh ! Exceptions don't count."

" Nevertheless," I replied emphatically, " they exist " ; and I hurried away, piqued by the turn that the conversation had taken, and immediately, for no reason that I could understand and much against my will, began to think about Mrs. Holt.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH A YOUNG MAN DEFIES THE LAWS

THE poet whom I was so foolish as to mention to Giles was the son of Genevra's sister Norah, who had married a doctor in the Midlands. The doctor was now dead, and mother, son and a daughter lived in a Suffolk village only a few miles from Newmarket.

When I heard from Norah saying that I should be more than welcome, she mentioned that her son would be on the platform to meet me ; but when I alighted from the train I looked about in vain for any welcoming face. Beyond the station-master and one porter there were only two living creatures to be seen : a ram, with its wool very heavily yellow-ochred, tethered to a post, and a young man sitting on a truck with a pencil and paper in hand. He was in a tweed knickerbocker suit with a green flannel shirt and collar and a salmon-pink tie ; and on his long uncombed hair was a very large soft hat.

I passed him once or twice as I tarried there in the hope that some friendly greeting might materialize ; but he never looked at me. He often looked up, although at nothing but space, and his lips moved. Obviously he was composing, and not too easily. It was then that I remembered the poetical stigma : this young visionary in travail on the truck was Genevra's nephew !

After waiting a little longer, I had the satisfaction

of seeing him pocket his pencil and return to earth again, and I then asked him if he were Selwyn Grace.

He said he was, a rather attractive smile crossing his impatient disdainful face. He added that he had come to meet me.

"Well, here I am," I said.

"There's a pony-cart outside," he told me, and led the way, leaving me to carry my own bag.

That is the worst of these followers of the arts: they are so unpractical. During the twenty-four hours I was in his mother's house I never saw this boy do one single thing for anybody; and Alistair, at Moret, had always to be asked for the mustard. The Muses must have had very uncomfortable homes.

In the pony-cart, however, was a pretty child of thirteen or fourteen, whom I knew to be Veronica. About her there was no poetical abstraction whatever.

She greeted me warmly.

"I couldn't think what had happened," she then said to her brother, a little sharply. "And I didn't dare to leave Toby. Why have you been so long?"

"I'm afraid it was my fault," said Selwyn. "I didn't notice the train come in."

"Didn't notice it!" she said. "Oh, poor Uncle Cavanagh! What a shame! You see," she explained to me, "he calls himself a poet, and poets think it's clever not to hear trains come in. Toby heard it and jumped all over the road, but then Toby's not a poet, he's only a perfect pet who tries to do his duty."

"I'm very sorry," said Selwyn to me. "I was trying to finish something."

"I thought you were," I said, "so I didn't interrupt you."

At this, Veronica, who was driving, looked at me with wide blue eyes that said, as plainly as speech, "Are you an idiot too? Funny humouring him like

that!" and I could see that I had sunk in her estimation.

"And did you finish it?" I asked.

"I think so," he said. "The first draft. But I shall have to go over it again. That's the worst of *vers libre*, you never quite know when you've finished."

"So you write *vers libre*?" I asked.

"Of course," he said. "That's the only way to keep any control of the sense; the only way to be responsible for your words."

I said I was afraid I didn't quite understand.

"Why," he explained, "if you write in rhyme, you are in the power of the machinery. The words are not the best words, but the words that rhyme. Again, if you write in blank verse, you are in the power of the machinery again. Each line must have ten syllables and a definite stress and the words must therefore be chosen to be arranged accordingly. Not the best words, but the convenient words. The result is that you are made to say things that were not in your mind at all."

"That may be true," I said, "but some pretty good things have been said both in rhyme and blank verse, notwithstanding."

"Oh, I grant that," he replied. "But you can't produce a single example of either in which I couldn't show you where the words could be improved—of course at the sacrifice of rhyme and scansion."

I groaned. "Then I've got to give up Keats and Milton too!" I said. "To say nothing of the 'Bab Ballads.' The young artists want me to scrap Leonardo and Raphael and Ingres and substitute what they call rhythm for accuracy and recognizable form, and now you would topple down my poetical gods. Don't you get any pleasure from Tennyson at all?"

He laughed a scornful laugh, which caused Toby to

break into a gallop and called down another rebuke from Veronica.

"Shakespeare, then?" I asked.

"From his drama, yes. But not from his technique. He'd have been much finer if he had written in prose."

"Well," I said, "it's all very strange and upsetting. You give me too much to think about." And again Veronica looked at me with wonderment that silently said, "How on earth can you, a grown man, old enough to be his grandfather, give him the faintest encouragement? If you lived in the house with him, as I do, you jolly well wouldn't."

After lunch my sister-in-law took me into the garden and we sat there in the shade.

"What do you think of Selwyn?" she asked me.

"He seems a nice boy who would be better if he were jostled a little by the world," I said. "I found his views on poetry very rebellious and advanced. The old days when we used to rhyme 'love' and 'dove' are a long way behind."

She sighed.

"I don't know what to do with him," she said.

"He's very self-willed. He won't think seriously of the future at all. He doesn't seem to have made friends at school, either. I wanted him to be a doctor, like his father, but he won't hear of it. Couldn't you advise him?"

"Not on such short acquaintance," I said. "I should probably put my foot in it at once. For one thing, I should have to say something about being a little more careful of his appearance. He wasn't very *soigné* at lunch, was he?"

"No, isn't it dreadful?" she said. "But that goes with his poetry. Poets should be superior to dress, he says. And of course they often have been."

"And often haven't, too," I replied. "Browning

wasn't a bad poet, but I'm told he was quite a dandy. Personally I prefer clean hands to grubby ones."

"And I too," she said. "But what is one to do? He doesn't seem to think of such things, poor boy. And he seems to have nothing but contempt for my opinions. If his father had lived it might be different. Boys often respect their fathers, or at any rate obey them. But he doesn't pay any attention to me, except to question all I say, and to laugh at my views. Can't you advise me?"

I must confess to an intense dislike of this attitude of derision towards their mothers which I have seen in two or three modern sons, but how to deal with it is a problem. That it is possible at all argues a fault in bringing up for which the mothers are perhaps to blame; but it was too late to suggest that. Besides, I think that Norah suspected it.

I said that, in default of a medical training, the only remedy I could suggest was for Selwyn to be put to work in a distant spot and given the smallest possible allowance. He would then have to obey orders, to toil, to rough it a little, and, by meeting other youths and men, to find his level. The result, unless he were to quit, could not but be good discipline and might make him value his home the more.

"What kind of employment?" she asked faintly.

I said I would make some inquiries, but I had, as a matter of fact, very little hope, because boys without ambition have no chance in the competition that is now raging, and boys who despised business were no use in it. All the same, I promised to ask Giles if there was a vacancy in his office.

"Do, please, do," she said; but I had the impression very strongly that no matter how Selwyn behaved she would be wretched if he left home.

I was glad when Veronica ran up and asked me to

go for a walk with her. She was one of those slender, straight little girls, like a sapling; without shyness but also without boldness. She talked freely and put her hand in mine quite naturally when we started off.

I like this kind of child. There is something very disheartening in the children—and they are too common—who can merely stammer yes and no, and who are always either in full retreat or are obviously meditating upon how to escape. Their opposites, the little effronterers, are worse, I admit, but I have met but few of them and then have escaped myself.

Veronica was natural and a welcome relief from her arrogant brother and my poor weak sister-in-law. Besides, I had not been in the company of a child for months.

“Which way shall we go?” I asked.

“Oh, along the road,” she said.

“But if we could find a field-path it would be more pleasant, wouldn’t it?” I suggested. “It’s very dusty to-day.”

“Of course, if you would rather,” she said. “But the road’s more fun.”

Naturally, I gave way. As Giles’s epigrammatist friend wrote, “Every girl is also a woman,” or something like that.

Veronica and I began with the ordinary ice picks, such as books and pastimes; but with the sound of the first motor horn on the road she asserted herself as an independent conversationalist and a modern far beyond me in knowledge of what was moving in the world. The car passed us in a cloud of dust that put my own dim eyes out of action. Not so Veronica’s orbs of blue.

“An Austin,” she said.

I was still half-blinded when another car rushed by
“Armstrong-Siddeley,” she said.

" Good heavens ! " I exclaimed. " How can you tell ? "

" Easily," she said. " They're so different. I know most of them."

This struck me as marvellous, for to my confused vision all cars are practically the same.

It was a high-road and a very busy one. The procession of machines was constant ; fat men all the while, sitting more or less on their shoulders, with saucy ladies beside them ; stately chauffeurs driving limousines ; and now and then a bareheaded youth on a clattering, shattering machine which Veronica called a mo'-bike, with a devoted dust-eating girl perched perilously behind him, clinging to his waist.

I remembered a time when, as a boy, I noted in a little book the name of every railway engine that I saw ; but how tame a pastime was that and how devoid of true knowledge !

She could even drive a car, it seems, this child, the doctor who succeeded to her father's practice having made a companion of her and allowing her, in a by-road, to take the wheel.

" Directly I'm old enough I'm going to have a two-seater," she said. " I cleaned Dr. Froster's car all the time his chauffeur had influenza."

No matter in what family I find myself I always reflect on the extraordinary difference between the status of childhood to-day and in my own nursery period. But that, I take it, is perennial wonderment : it always has existed and always will.

" What about Selwyn's poetry ? " I asked Veronica on our way back. " Do you like it ? "

" He never shows me any," she said. " But I don't think I should like it, because it doesn't rhyme. I like things that rhyme."

" How do you feel about him ? " I asked.

"I think," she said, "that he'd be much nicer if he went away. He doesn't do anything but loaf and write. He can't even drive a car." Her scorn was evident.

"I'm afraid I can't either," I confessed with shame.

"Oh, well, that's different," she said. "Selwyn's young enough to learn."

I contrived to get some talk with Selwyn after dinner, when we were left alone. For that meal he had made some concessions and wore a dinner jacket and a soft collar; but his hair was as rumpled as ever.

"What are you proposing to do with yourself?" I asked him.

"I want to go to America," he said. "They're keener on poetry there than people over here are."

"Your mother doesn't need you?" I asked.

"She's got Veronica," he said.

"Daughters and sons are different," I reminded him.

"I know," he said. "But one must live one's own life. We're only here once."

So that was it! They all say that now, and really it is not too easy to confute. I am no preacher anyway; but if I were, I should be only too conscious that the gospel of duty to others rather than ourselves has become the least simple to spread, even if one thinks that every one but oneself should practise it.

"You would want money if you went to America," I said.

"I should have to earn enough to get there," he agreed. "But once there I hope I could make a living. They like my kind of work."

"And how would you earn your passage?" I asked.

"Anyhow," he said. "I don't mind."

He gave me some MS. books, which I took to bed with me and examined. Most of his work was incoherently

ecstatic ; some was coarse and cynical ; now and then there was an idea with fancy in it and even poignancy. This was one that struck me as being pretty, but the inspiration probably was derived. It sounded Chinese.

APPRENTICESHIP

God first made the starry heavens.
Then, having learnt the way,
He made a hawthorn in full blossom.

That seemed to me ingenious, and I found myself, like Giles with the epigrammatist, wondering how he could have thought of it. But most authors whom we have met in person set up such problems.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH THE WIND BLOWS ON THE HEATH

THE next day I took a ticket only as far as Newmarket, not with any view of witnessing a race, for the season was just over, but in order to carry out yet one more errand of avuncular investigation.

For there dwelt on the borders of that abode of perfect horses and imperfect men one of Genevra's nieces, Winifred Musters (*née* Tracy), who some few years ago had at once thrilled and outraged her family by falling in love with the son of a Newmarket trainer and subsequently marrying him.

The thrill which ran through the Thorold clan was due to the circumstance that Winnie's marriage was to bring her into association with the fascinating and capricious creatures that set half the country in a fever of expectancy on every racing morning. For no matter how reprehensible racing may be, it has its glamour too, even for the uncommon good. The family's shocked feelings were due to the same cause.

Winnie had taken her bold and revolutionary step some eight years earlier, and her husband, after an honourable absence in the War, was now established at Newmarket in his late father's shoes.

I have never been a racing-man; a ticket for the Derby in the sweep at the club is the extent of my annual ventures in the whirlpool of wagering; but I

have always been fond of horses for their own sake, and I looked forward as much to seeing a few of the best at close quarters as to meeting another member of the family. Having taken a room at the Rutland, I walked over to the Musters' place after lunch.

What a curious town it is, this capital of an industry that probably never should have come into existence, and the total elimination of which would certainly be a national blessing! Few English towns are so healthy. The wind from the Heath touches every cheek with bloom. But salubrity is not the only interest of the community; betting is in the air too, and I wondered, as I walked up the clean, broad street, with its shops and cinemas and (I should guess) heavily overworked post-office, how the populace's accounts balance at the end of each season. For where every other inhabitant is a little wizened man in riding-breeches there must be an embarrassment of "information."

My acquaintance with trainers began and ended with Tony Musters, so I am unable to say whether he was typical or not; but I guess not. The ordinary trainer's son, I take it, is educated in the stable rather than at Harrow, where this young man had been; and his saddle is, as a rule, more than lexicons. Possibly, had Tony been a midget, he might have been brought up differently; but being a big, heavy fellow, he was obviously not predestined to ride professionally, and therefore his father, who, I understand, was one of the finer, more independent, men in his strange calling, decided to make a gentleman of him instead. He had not anticipated that Tony would in time become a trainer too: it was another and smaller son to whom he looked to succeed him; but the smaller son had been thrown and fatally injured, and Tony had given up other plans and stepped into the place with deter-

mination and was well known as one of the ablest and straightest of the younger school. It is humiliating to have to use the word "straightest," for it carries with it an implication; but that is no fault of mine. If I had my way, there should be no race that did not go to the swiftest; no race in which every jockey was not trying his best to win. But it is probably a very fortunate thing for the world that its control does not rest with me.

Of Tony I found myself, as an uncle, feeling rather proud—with a regret that Genevra had never permitted me to meet him before. Perhaps "never permitted" is a little too strong, but any husband who may chance to read these lines will know what I mean when I amend it to "had never encouraged a meeting." Compromise is the breath of married life; and it is almost more important for a man to learn what his wife deprecates than what she applauds. The temperature of the hot water into which he is predestined periodically to plunge, will be lower if he disregards her enthusiasms than if he fails to share her antipathies.

Be that as it may—and I am not thinking any disloyalty to Genevra, whose most illogical whim I wish I still had the opportunity to respect and obey—I had never seen either Winnie or Tony until now; and I liked them both. They began by reproaching me for staying at the Rutland instead of under their roof; and they did it so heartily that I could not be anything but flattered, and flattery is an excellent introduction.

It was a very pleasant house too, with sunny rooms, and spaniels about one's feet. If I have to stumble over any living creature may it always be a spaniel, because spaniels are so divine in their forgiveness. Very few books did I see, but very many pictures—

all of horses that had been trained by one or other Musters and were qualified to sit for their portraits by having done the most gratifying thing that a horse can do—come in first. Beautiful slender creatures with famous names.

“You’d like to see the stables?” asked Mrs. Musters.

I said I would. Indeed, I almost added it was what I had come for, but checked myself in time.

“But he must see our own fillies first,” said her husband; and he went to the door and emitted a loud hunting cry which was answered shrilly from somewhere above, and then sounded a rush of pattering feet on the stairs and in burst two little girls, both woolly as Eskimos, with a mass of light curls under their caps.

On catching sight of me they turned to stone and their eyes became grave and questioning instead of merry and anticipatory.

“This is your great uncle,” said their mother.

They examined me curiously, their expressions indicating disappointment with so poor a stature: some inches less, all over, than their father’s.

“Say ‘How do you do,’” their mother bade them; and they advanced solemnly and laid a tiny hand in mine and put the time-worn question; and once again I felt shame at the power of a stranger to freeze so much liveliness and fun.

However, we soon got on to friendlier terms, for I had been careful in Newmarket’s broad high street to step into a sweet shop. Phoebe Muir had forewarned me.

They told me that their names were Deb and Dinky, and one was six—Deb—and the other—Dinky—was five.

If they had been boys they would have been jockeys;

even as it was, I was told, they intended to spend most of their lives on horseback.

They each had a Shetland pony to show me. Also they each had a racehorse. I must come and see them at once; and so we all started for the stables, an Eskimo hauling at either of my hands.

The minuteness of the great uncle was already forgiven.

My nephew had some dozen horses in active preparation and a few yearlings. The horses belonged to various owners; the yearlings were the property of himself, his wife and his daughters. We passed from box to box in this most admirable establishment and the favourites of fortune were displayed to us. With every horse was a lad—it is a privileged word, for some of them were older than I—brushing, or combing, and all making that soothing, hissing immemorial sound which no clay-souled chauffeur has ever learned. Odd little creatures, these lads, with their bent legs and tight breeches and unmistakable equine-imity. Go where they would for the rest of their lives, dress as they would, not one of them, from the youngest to the oldest, could ever disguise his ancient calling or efface the stable mark. No brand is so indelible.

Tony exhibited the special points of his charges. "Look at those shoulders!" he said.

"Look at that coat. You could see to shave in it."

"That's a son of Polymelus. He won at Doncaster last year. We're preparing him for the Lincoln.

"That's a filly by Charles O'Malley. She's in the Oaks. She's the prettiest thing ever. Aren't you, my beauty?" and he held her startled quiet head against his cheek.

"Look at those hind legs—There's speed for you! Feel her withers." And he caressed her again.

"Aren't you sometimes jealous?" I asked Winnie.

"Almost," she said.

The children knew all the horses' names and the names of the lads too—Jim and Ted and George and Bert. Nothing but my nervous grasp kept them from dashing in among the hoofs.

"This is mine," said Deb (or was it Dinky?) when we came to the yearlings. "I named it myself."

"What is its name?" I asked.

"Velvety," she said.

"And this is mine," said Dinky (or was it Deb?).

"Mine is called Peter Rabbit. It's going to win the Derby. Daddy says so."

I came away from Heath Edge with the conviction that there at any rate Genevra's money was not needed, and that there, at any rate for the time being, was marital affection and trust.

Giles was buried in an evening paper when I looked in on him the next evening.

"Damn these rags!" he said, emerging very testily. "Why don't they have an index? Or put the number of the page on the poster? I saw a poster which said 'Death of Big Game Hunter,' but I can't find it anywhere. All I can find is politics and cocaine."

"Let me look," I said. "Here it is. Some one named Mackintosh."

"Oh, Mackintosh," said Giles. "That's not interestin'. I was hopin' it was Lethbridge."

"Giles," I said, "you're getting too much interested in Nollie."

"No, I'm not," he replied sharply. "Don't be ridiculous. But it is permitted, I take it, to wish that she was free. This feller Lethbridge is no use to any one, and might as well be dead. I'm against shootin' big game, anyway; it's time some of the

big game got a hunter or two. I should like to read that he'd been eaten by a giraffe."

I reminded Giles that giraffes are strict vegetarians.

"Well, then, a lion. Or was trampled by an elephant. The feller's a nuisance while he's alive. Dead, he'd be very useful."

"Do you mean to say that if Nollie were a widow you would think seriously about marriage?" I asked.

"Knowing what you do of her views on men?"

"I say nothing of the kind," he replied, with heat.

"But she's a nice girl and she ought to be free. Don't you give me credit for any form of disinterestedness?"

"No," I said.

"Well, I am at liberty to believe that if she were free she would probably be different in her ideas." He drew himself up.

"Do you know," he went on, impressively, "that in the small hours this very mornin' a man died in the flat above mine. It gave me a nasty jar, I don't mind admittin'. But—with this other feller in the evenin' paper—it shows that there's a good deal of death knockin' about. Nollie may be all right yet."

"What sort of a trainer is Musters?" I asked.

"The young one? Oh, he's not bad. I preferred the old one myself. These young fellers who have been to a public school don't seem like the real thing. I like the old ones with weather-beaten faces and a straw in their mouth and a white hat. But he finds some winners, the new one."

"I hear he's as straight as a die," I said.

"You can't train in kid gloves," was Giles's reply.

"And there's always some one to do your crookedness for you. You've got to be artful on the Turf. It demands it. No, if you're lookin' for a Bayard I shouldn't search racin' stables."

"Where would you look for one?" I retorted, for

I didn't like aspersions on Deb and Dinky's father.
"In the City?"

"No," said Giles, "in Colney Hatch."

"I suppose you haven't got a vacancy for a young man in your office?" I went on.

"No," said Giles promptly. "What kind of a young man?"

"He's about nineteen: a son of one of Genevra's sisters," I said.

"Not the poet you were mentionin'?"

"Yes."

"No, I haven't," said Giles.

"Couldn't you stretch a point?" I asked.

"I'll see," said Giles. "But I should say not. Don't build on it."

CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH A RUBBISH FIRE IS ACTIVE

ONE of my first duties on settling in London again was to see Vaddy. In such a condition as his, he ought to be kept in touch. But he was out of town, his housekeeper told me. He was staying with Sir Rendle Vaux.

"I am very glad," I said. "That will be good for him," and she agreed.

There are usually men whom our wives would have married if they hadn't married us, and Rendle Vaux, I fancy, would have been Genevra's choice. I know that he was in love with her, and I know that she had a very tender spot in her heart for him. As it happened, I became her husband and Rendle found a wife elsewhere. But he and Genevra often met and we were a friendly trio; while Vaddy often joined us. Lady Vaux could have completed the quintette had she been so minded, but she was one of those women who make of their domestic duties a constant tether. There was always something to keep her at home.

At the Vaux's place in Wiltshire Vaddy should be fairly safe.

I walked back through the Park. It was one of those still November days when the earth seems to be holding its breath. The trees were getting bare; the ground was soft; the sky was misty, a sinking sun faintly diffusing gold.

Suddenly a whiff of burning leaves mixed with the

keen air, and in a moment I was a child again, so curiously can a scent restore the past. No, not restore it—no such happy fortune as that!—but recall it.

In a corner of our old home garden there was a continuous rubbish fire—and about it was our favourite gathering place, our refuge from elders and visitors, our senate, and our restaurant, for we ate there too, chiefly potatoes cooked under the ashes. Food for the gods;—there is nothing with such flavour to-day: *cordons bleus* wear out their lives in vain. We talked there, plotted there, hid there, sulked there, cried there, railed there against fate and the conspiracy to misunderstand the young, and there in penitential mood promised ourselves we would be better.

The pungent aromatic odours of burning vegetation have never failed to bring back the old impressions, not only of the garden corner and the actual triumphs and tribulations that it witnessed, but of the house too, the family, the neighbourhood. One whiff is the "Open Sesame" to so many of the doors of the brain.

This afternoon it was almost more than I could bear. . . .

I saw my father on the lawn patiently playing himself at croquet, as he did on every fine day, and sometimes, in big goloshes and a mackintosh, in a deluge, for the balls, he said, ran truer when it was wet. I saw my mother standing beside the aviary calling the birds by name and feeding them one by one—little foreign birds for the most part, avadavats, Java sparrows, budgerigars.

A strange part of it is that this scent revives other scents. The billiard-room with its Russia leather atmosphere drawn from the bookshelves mingling with last night's cigars; the gun-room with its smell of oil; the cellar with its smell of mouldiness and beer; the

drawing-room, faintly musty, with a white covering to the carpet and potpourri in great coloured bowls.

I saw Giles, tall and thin and masterful, selecting the best potato and sending me to the kitchen for salt and pepper and, if it could be managed, butter. If it could be managed (there was no such word as wangle in those distant peaceable days)—for Martha, although she would dole out the condiments freely enough, was a miser when it came to dairy produce.

I saw Belle trotting about the house; but Belle was a less familiar figure than Giles, for she was so much younger and we were at school for most of each year.

Those were all of us—Giles, Belle and myself. But two others, Vincent and Eunice, had died at an early age, and their portraits in coloured chalks on the walls used to fascinate us, for they were, according to our mother, so definitely in Heaven.

I used to wonder what those others now in the churchyard would have been like had they not died, so perfect were their characters. They were very pretty in their pictures: a fair little boy and a fair little girl, and I was never quite sure whether they were more beloved by our mother for having gone before and become angels, than we for living on with all our faults. Death was a complete canonization. There was a kind of feeling that had they lived they would have been perfect. "Little Vincent would never have done that!" Even the nurse had this useful comparison at her tongue's end. "Little Eunice would have washed her hands without being told." Every Sunday after church we visited their headstones and it was impossible not to think of them lying below.

Rubbish fires are not good for the lonely, and this one filled me with depression and discontent.

What had I done with my life? I asked myself. I had idled most of it away: very happily, it is true, with Genevra, but I had done nothing. Beyond sitting on committees, nothing. The Old Man's money had come just at the right time—or wrong time—to keep me out of work. While Genevra was there to stimulate me in my hobbies and share them, I had the feeling that they were enough. But this afternoon, with the blue smoke of retrospect floating about the sky, I was only too conscious of time mis-spent and a dreary, lonely future.

And Giles, what of him? If I had been unproductive, he had been more so. I at any rate had fulfilled part of nature's law by marrying. He had not even done that.

What, I wondered, did those two, our mother and father, think of us, if they were able to survey their children from the loopholes of their everlasting retreat.

And Belle—how long it was since I had seen her! Not since the funeral, and then only for a few minutes. I would pay her a visit, I decided. Soon. And be jolly with her children. It would be splendid to be among children again. Perhaps she would let me come for Christmas? Christmas is a season of increasing gloom as one grows older. One may have the best will in the world to add to its brightness and put on the garb of merriment, but the fact remains that, for the ageing, at Christmas the ghosts congregate, and every year there are more of them. I shouldn't mind it so much at Belle's.

This promised to be a very bad time for me, but among children I thought I could weather it creditably; and so, with memories of Veronica, who, for all her cool maturity, was a very delightful child to watch, and those little woolly pets, Deb and Dinky, strongly

in my mind, I wrote to Belle directly I got in, to ask if she would allow me to come.

"I shall probably be a wet blanket," I said, "but I'll do my best to be cheerful."

That evening, as I was reading after dinner, Giles himself walked in. He had come from the Bourbon and was mellow.

After refusing a cigar, saying that he preferred one of his own, if I didn't mind, he stretched himself in a deep chair and became talkative.

"I saw Nollie this afternoon," he said. "She's goin' to apply for a restitution order. Quite right too. That feller goin' off to Africa like that!"

"She wants a divorce then?" I said.

"She wants to be free at any rate," said Giles. "And I don't blame her: As a matter of fact I'm helpin' her."

Giles, with all his self-protectiveness and caution, helping her! Things had come to a strange pass.

CHAPTER XX

IN WHICH IT IS DARKEST BEFORE THE DAWN

ON my return home, I found this letter, from Rose Holt :

DEAR MR. BECKETT,—

I am sorry to have to tell you that my mother's old friend and mine, Dr. Greville, died last week. Mother and I would much appreciate a call from you when you are in the neighbourhood again. I am now living here permanently. There is no other news.

Yours sincerely,
ROSE.

I went down to Rye a few days later.

Mrs. Holt, looking very distinguished and sweet in black, was alone in the drawing-room.

"I have been on the point of writing to you more than once," she said, "but I didn't."

"I wish you had," I said.

"I am not a good letter-writer," she explained. "I would always rather say it; and so let me say it now. I wanted to thank you for helping Rose. I don't know Mr. Muir and so I can say nothing as to his suitability or unsuitability, but I am sure that Rose was not being too wise. And you saved her."

"'Saved' is rather a strong word," I remarked.

"Perhaps it is—and I was forgetting that he is

your nephew." She laughed. "But obviously Rose was more in love than he, or he would have written. And he hasn't done so."

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"Rose would have told me," she said.

I must have smiled sceptically, for she was at me in a flash.

"You doubt that?"

"No, not doubt," I said. "I could doubt nothing you told me. But I've always thought it rather strange, your absolute conviction—and Dr. Greville's too—that Rose had no secrets from you."

"I am sure of it," said her mother. "We're odd people, Rose and I, and one of our oddities is candour. Perhaps it's because we're lazy, or is it tidy? At any rate we can't be bothered with lies. I am so very anxious," she went on, "that Rose shouldn't make the mistake that I did. Not that we can prevent folly in others," she added, "but it is rather nice to try. My marriage turned out badly and then——" She paused. "I wonder," she said, "what you would say about my case."

"Won't you tell me?"

"Briefly, I went away with another man when Rose was quite a big child."

"Yes?" I said.

"I had long ceased to care for my husband," she went on; "love him I know now I never did, nor would he have known what to do with real love; and I am sure he never really loved me."

"But you were sufficiently in love with him," I remarked, "to be able to marry him, and you didn't go until Rose was six or seven?"

"That is true. But he stood still and I—I developed. Or merely changed, if you like. At any rate we did not move in one line or even on parallel lines; and I

grew to—if not hate him, find him so impossible that to remain under any circumstances would have been a treachery to both our lives, and, as it happened, considering everything, would have been a sin. Or so I held then and hold still.”

“Yes?”

“And so—well, some one having come into my life—an old friend—broken and in need of care and love and particularly of me—not capriciously either—real need—I joined him.” She smiled wanly.

“Yes?” I said again.

“We lived abroad and Dr. Greville brought up Rose as he had earlier brought up me. Her father—oddly enough—wished it.” She paused. “We may, between us,” she continued, “have spoiled his life.”

“Or made it?” I suggested.

“He was not unhappy as a guardian,” she said, “I am sure of that; sure. But you never know what he might have done. After all, to be a foster-father is not Nature’s idea for a man.”

“There are born celibates,” I remarked. “In any case, I am going to think of Dr. Greville as happy: indeed, one of the happiest of all men. The ‘saddest words,’ ” I added, “can sometimes be ‘It might not have been’ too.”

“You are very consoling,” she said.

“And after you went away?” I asked.

“There is little more to tell. We were deliciously happy. For twelve years. Then Ronnie died; and here I am.”

“And your husband?” I asked.

“My husband—as you rightly call him, but it is not a word I ever care to use except in the past tense—is alive. I hear from him occasionally. Rose sees him, but as seldom as possible because she doesn’t like him.”

"You don't mind not being free?" I asked, after a while.

"It doesn't affect me," she said. "I should never marry again. But Eustace shrank from divorcing me when he could have done so, and I can hardly take any step. Fortunately there is enough money for both Rose and myself, without any of his. And she and I get on together almost as though we were contemporaries."

"Rose has so much before her," I said.

"That is true," said her mother. "But we must live day by day. As I said, we are odd people, she and I, and we take short views. Meanwhile we are a united couple and that surely is no little thing." She smiled her adorable smile.

"The fact that Rose took your advice suggests," she resumed, "that there may possibly be a little progress in the world after all. Surely for a child to be wiser than its parent *is* progress?"

"I never heard that Judith Shakespeare surpassed her father as a dramatist," I replied.

"But I'm not sure that Rose, if she persevered, might not paint quite as well as her grandfather," said Mrs. Holt. "Let's go and find her."

We found her in a room that had been converted into a studio, working away in a blue smock covered with splashes of colour.

I thought she looked thinner and rather unhappy; but she seemed delighted to see me, which I thought magnanimous. She might so easily have considered me the cause of all her woes.

She was painting a portrait of an old weather-beaten man, who had lived at Rye for years and years and now sunned himself in the little battery garden on a pension.

"We'll stop now," Rose said, and the old fellow

got up stiffly from his chair and prepared to leave.

"I wonder if you knew Mr. Henry James?" I asked him.

"The gentleman who used to live in Lamb House? Of course I did. I knew him well. He used to pull my leg. Out-and-out jokey sort of gentleman he was. I don't say I could understand all he said, but he was out-and-out jokey. He was nearly as old as me, but he always talked as if I was hundreds of years old. He's dead now, poor gentleman. He often sat on the bench beside me at the Wipers. He used to pretend to believe that I lived here when the sea came right up to the walls. Asked me how high the waves were and that sort of thing. Supposed we all fished from our windows! A nice gentleman though. We were all sorry when he left."

"I wish you'd let me paint you," Rose said, when the Oldest Inhabitant had gone.

"For your gallery of Nestors?" I suggested.

"Not a bit," she replied. "You're not in the least a Nestor. But I should like to. I should hang it as a pendant to the head of dear old Dombeen—Dr. Greville, I mean—that I did. Do you know, you're rather like him. Isn't he, mother? And it would keep you in the neighbourhood. We could go some lovely walks too. Try and persuade him, mother."

"I don't need persuading," I said. "It's merely a question of time and arrangement. If you'll repeat the invitation a little later, perhaps I will. Indeed, if you found me a little house here, I think I would take it."

Rose accompanied me to the hotel.

"So you have heard nothing?" I said.

"Not directly," she replied. "I have had letters from my friends in Paris, saying that he has been away. He is not working very hard, they say. Don't you think I ought to go back?"

"Certainly not," I said.

She looked very wistful. "I can't work here," she said. "I'm just muddling on, but it is all drudgery. There's no fun in it. Mayn't I go back?"

"It's not in my power to stop you," I said. "But I hope you'll wait a little longer. If Alistair doesn't give any sign of life before—before say the end of January——"

"Why, that's nearly six weeks," she objected

"Yes—and a very fair period of time. If Alistair doesn't give any sign of life before then you will know that you and he are not for one another. Won't you?"

"I suppose so," she said.

"But you wouldn't surely go on thinking of him after that? If he lets you go so easily as he seems to be doing? That wouldn't be what they used to call maidenly."

"I don't care tuppence about being maidenly," said Rose. "Times have changed and women must look after themselves. But—Oh, how I wonder," she murmured, with a puzzled far-away look. "He's so very honest, you know. He's the most honest person I ever met. He can't bear any kind of self-deception, or to be under even the suspicion of false colours. What I believe is that he has begun lots of letters to me and torn them up, trying to express just how he feels and then becoming sensitive and mistrusting his own powers of expression. He's the kind of man who would be unfair to himself. What you called selfishness was really his terrific earnestness. I know it. I know it."

"The fact remains," I had to say, "that he let you go and has done nothing since to get you back."

"But oh, suppose that he cared for me," she cried, "and he thinks that I went off because I couldn't

bear him ! That would be terrible. How can we know why people avoid us unless they tell ? We wonder and wonder and then poison creeps in. Oh, I wish you'd let me go back. Not to pester him, but just to find out how he thinks of me. He may have it all so woefully wrong."

How to comfort her I did not know, and we parted at the door of the "George " mutually depressed.

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH THE DAWN BREAKS

THE arrangement was for me to go round to Mrs. Holt's for luncheon the next day, but at ten o'clock I was told that Miss Holt was downstairs and would like to see me.

Her face was bright and smiling: its radiance was almost dazzling.

"I've had a letter!" she said.

"So I can see," was my reply.

She couldn't show it to me—this with an unconscious quick gesture that told me where its repository was: very near her heart—it would be too embarrassing to her for another to read the absurd things he said about her—but she would tell me what she could.

"No, don't," I said. "Let me tell you instead. I'll try and see it."

I placed my hand over my eyes as though I were performing a clairvoyant feat of desperate difficulty and momentousness.

"He says," I began, "that he has treated you badly, without consideration, without realizing that it was he who should have ministered to you and not you to him?"

"Something like that," she said. "But how could you know? And of course it isn't true: he couldn't behave badly."

"Then he apologizes for using you as an audience, as a chorus, and taking advantage of your willingness

to help; presuming, in short, on your unselfishness in every way."

Her eyes became wider as she listened. "Yes," she said. "But it's absurd to call me unselfish. Just as if I didn't love it and was doing it all to please myself!"

"Then he says," I went on, "that now he is no longer blind, he can see what an angel you are. Does he say that?"

"How on earth could you know he calls me an angel?" she asked almost in fear, as though the Black Arts were really in being.

"But he does?" I asked.

"Yes. He does." She thrilled.

"And then he says you are the only thing he wants, doesn't he?"

"Yes. He does."

"And he goes on—as for painting, he doesn't mind if he never paints again. As a matter of fact, without you he can't paint, he has done nothing worth looking at for weeks and weeks. All his old confidence has gone. It came from you and it went with you. Doesn't he say that?"

"But how can you know?" she gasped again. "It's amazing, it's uncanny. Have you heard from him yourself?"

"Not a word," I said. "And lastly—he says he adores you, and wants you to marry him: at once, to-morrow. He'll fly over if you give the word. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, yes," she cried.

"And you?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's too wonderful. Suppose he didn't really mean it? He hasn't seen me for so long. Suppose it's just loneliness makes him think like this and write like this?"

"I won't suppose it," I said. "I'd sooner suppose that Rose Holt is a vain little goose, fishing for compliments. Only geese don't fish. And what does your mother say?"

"She says I'm to do just as I wish."

"Which is," I stated firmly, "to go straight to the post-office and send a telegram bidding Alistair to come at once to see you."

"Will you come down while he's here?" she asked eagerly.

"I fear I must," I said. "Having become a meddler in this matter I must see it through. I shouldn't be surprised if I gave you away."

"You are a great darling," she said, and I shall never hear sweeter words.

"And now for the post-office!" I cried.

"Yes," she said. "And I'll give the Oldest Inhabitant a miss this morning and you and I will walk to Winchelsea and back."

"And whenever we tire of the scenery," I put in, "I shouldn't be surprised if there were occasional references to the surpassing merits of one Alistair Muir."

CHAPTER XXII

IN WHICH THE DINNER HYMN IS SUNG

BELLE had replied, imploring me to come, and when the time was ripe, two or three days before Christmas, I went off.

I provided myself first with gifts suitable for every kind of child—for I had forgotten exactly how the family was composed : all I knew was that there were several, and that Belle's husband, Colonel Trevor, had been killed in the War. After adding some boxes of the best crackers with caps, because no Christmas is complete without fantastic head-gear, I was ready for anything.

Berkshire on a wet December day has nothing to recommend it, and my spirits sank low indeed on the journey to my sister's place ; but directly I entered the house I felt serene. It was a spacious Georgian house, in its own grounds, with white wainscoting and huge fireplaces. There was holly everywhere, and warmth and welcome.

Moreover, the air was full of that feeling of excitement that pervades the home of large families just before Christmas. Secrets were being guarded, if not kept. Doors were opened to admit a peering face and then closed again, with a giggle. Feet scampered on stairs. Shouts were heard in the distance. Piteous appeals for brown paper and string, scissors and sealing wax, sounded on all sides.

You know the kind of things that one overhears.

"Of course the mistletoe must go in the middle, fathead. What's the use of mistletoe on a wall? You've got to be able to get *under* it!"

"Don't squeal like that! It's lucky to be pricked by holly."

"Some one come and hold this step ladder."

"Why is Christmas 'merry' and New Year only 'happy'? I shall put 'a merry Christmas' and 'a merry New Year' too."

"Shut your eyes, all of you. No one must see what I'm carrying."

But let me describe the family.

First there was Belle, a placid widow, the slave of her children but not ill-treated by them. They were naturally affectionate, and Colonel Trevor had lived long enough to discipline them in courtesy.

There were five in all: three girls and two boys. The girls were Avril, January and June, and perhaps you can guess in what month they had their birthdays; the boys were Noel and Valentine, and perhaps you can guess at their birthdays too.

The first idea of every family in England being to substitute a nickname for the name which father and mother took so much trouble to find and the clergyman pronounced with such care while the baby was screaming at the font, all five children were known otherwise. Instead of being called Avril, Avril was called either Goldfish or Goldie—the fish part of the nickname coming from the *Poissons d'Avril* which the French exchange on All Fools' Day and the "gold" from the colour of her hair.

Noel, who was about twelve, with spectacles, was called Card or Cardie, because he was born on the day when Christmas cards arrive.

January was known as Jane, and the girl about

nine with the long lashes and blue eyes (June at the font) as Eggles. Valentine, a little busy boy about seven, was Bish. Eggles came from Mrs. Trevor's own special name for June, which was Eglantine, the pretty wild rose that makes the hedges sweet and gay at midsummer, and Bish was an abbreviation of Bishop Valentine, the saint, whose day is February 14.

The children called their mother "Mother" simply, except on very special occasions, when January, who was inclined to be rather managing, addressed her very seriously as Belle Beckett—her name before Captain Trevor fell in love with her and made her his; or June, who was clingingly affectionate, slipped a finger into her mother's hand and whispered "Darling Heart."

They admitted me at once into the family and I was made useful.

I held paper festoons at the feet of ladders. I pinned up mottoes with borders of holly. I fixed candles to the Christmas tree, being very careful to arrange them so that the flame would ignite a branch immediately above, the scent of a burning Christmas tree being among the best of all.

"Uncle Cavanagh, will you hold this nail while I hammer it?"

(Pull yourself together. No flinching!)

"Uncle Cavanagh, do you know any conjuring tricks?"

(Not one. A wasted life.)

"Uncle Cavanagh, will you go to Reading with us to-morrow? We've got to get a few more things."

I must confess to being not a little flattered by these evidences of trust and camaraderie.

It is extraordinary, I thought, as I dressed for dinner

before a roaring fire, what nice children dull parents can have ! It is not unfraternal to say that my sister Belle is just a very ordinary pleasant kind of woman unburdened by brains, and I should be a traitor to veracity if I called her husband anything but a very ordinary type of soldier ; but their children are delightful creatures, every one, each in its own way. I reproached myself for letting so long a period elapse without seeing them. \

And then I thought again of what an odd and perilous undertaking is marriage, with its consequent foundation of a family. Take our own case—the Becketts. For millions of years we were not. The universe was taking shape ; the moon died ; protoplasm became apes ; apes became men ; history set in ; and still there were no Becketts. Then a male child is born—my father. Twenty-four years or so later, he meets a girl at a Hunt Ball ; they dance, sit out, talk, are mutually attracted, cultivate each other's acquaintance, are engaged and married. In due course are added to the world the personalities of Giles, myself and Belle, each a new being, in certain respects unlike anything ever born before or ever to be born after, each having some influence, making something, marring something : Giles manipulating money in the city ; Belle marrying and bringing a lot of new and very agreeable and amusing children into the world ; and I moving about in the hope of finding some one worthy to share my poor Genevra's inheritance, and interfering with young people's attachments ! Our existence depends wholly on chance. Here we are ; we are solid facts ; framed photographs of us stand on pianos ; we like being alive ; we enjoy our individuality ; we eat, drink, are fairly merry ; but had my father not gone to that Hunt Ball we shouldn't be here at all. We should not be at all !

This jolly great house would be empty—at any rate so far as its present occupants were concerned.

I was interrupted by a knock at the door and the entrance of Bish.

He told me he was staying up to dinner that evening, because of me. There would be two ducks, with stuffing, and apple dumplings.

He examined my dressing bag and its silver-topped fittings with an interest that is never lacking in the young.

He expressed satisfaction with the aroma of my cigar box.

And then the gong sounded. "I'm waiting to take you down," he said. "We want you to march with us."

"March?"

"Yes. On special occasions we always march. And sing. They're all waiting."

True enough, the other four were waiting outside and we descended the old oak staircase, with its easy wide steps, singing the family chant; which, I learned, was based on a saying of a former ancient gardener and had been arranged metrically by their father.

Plato no doubt was a corker, but this is *our* phil-os-o-fee: We've got to be ready for dinner when dinner is ready for we.

I woke in the middle of the night with the battle hymn in my head.

We've got to be ready for dinner when dinner is ready for we.

The fire was dying, and as its last flicker faded away I found myself, by some odd transition, murmuring,

We've got to be ready for churchyard when churchyard is ready for we.

Not a bad philosophy either !

" But I mustn't be morbid," I said to myself.

" Not in such a house as this ! "

And with that resolve I fell asleep again.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN WHICH A RAILWAY-OFFICIAL BECOMES HUMAN

I STAYED at Belle's for ten days and was happy. It was on New Year's Eve, I think, that I was sitting in a corner of the big library, in a kind of bay, examining a book, when I overheard a scrap of conversation not intended for me. Avril and June came in for a moment and Avril said :

"Uncle Cavanagh's much nicer than he used to be, isn't he?"

"Yes," said June. "How silly of us to think he was going to be a stodge!"

And then they wandered out again without seeing me.

I thought about this criticism for a long while. I was not conscious of any change and therefore assumed that it was due to the fact that on my previous visits I had been accompanied by Genevra, and from the children's point of view was rather too much with her. Children like either complete devotion to their interests or complete disregard. I was now free to give them all my attention and very glad to be amused by doing so. But there seemed to be an injustice to Genevra somewhere, and that I resented.

It was too much to say that she wasn't fond of children; but she had not a very easy way with them. Her own childlessness may have had something to

do with this. Anyway, although I liked being a favourite, I felt very strongly that their aunt ought not to be under even the suspicion of a cloud, and there and then I resolved to put this right. They should have a memorial of Genevra which they should value more than anything ever given to them.

And I knew what it should be, too. I remembered the *wagon-lit* between Hendaye and Paris.

No sooner did I reach Paddington than I put my things in the cloak-room and made inquiries about seeing a pundit.

What sort of a pundit?

I wouldn't say. I knew that to tell them my business was to be discouraged.

Couldn't I be more explicit?

No. It was important, I said, and that was all. It must be some one in authority.

After a while and much circumlocution I was—having a good coat on and no suggestion of humility—shown into an office where a benevolent looking gentleman sat at a desk. He had all the surrounding paraphernalia of the business magnates on the films, and while I was with him he was rung up five times and carried on five conversations. The only difference between him and a cinema actor was that I could hear what he said, instead of reading it afterwards, and I never saw the people at the other end of the wire with lips writhing too.

"And what can I do for you?" he asked.

"It's rather an odd request," I said. "But can you tell me what you do with your sleeping cars when they are too old?"

"We scrap them," he said. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I want to buy one," I replied. "Is that possible?"

Here his telephone bell rang.

"Excuse me," he said, and for two minutes I sat still.

"I'm sorry," he said, when he had finished.

"What were you asking?"

"I want to know," I said, "if I can buy an old sleeping car."

"I couldn't say off-hand," he said. "It's a new idea and new ideas must be considered very carefully."

"Or, not at all," I suggested.

"Oh no!" he said reproachfully. "We should look into it; but railway companies have to be deliberate."

At this moment he was rung up again, and again he apologized, before and after.

"About that sleeping car," he said. "I'll make inquiries and let you know. As a matter of fact, a new model has come in with only ten compartments, to supersede the old, which had eleven, and I'll find out if any of the old ones remain. Do you mind saying what you want it for?"

"I want it," I said, "as a present."

"For children?" he asked.

"Yes, a family. I want it as a toy for them. To set up in the wood near the house."

"And each to have one of the compartments for itself?" he inquired eagerly.

"Exactly," I said.

"And have tea in, and perhaps sleep as a great treat?" he went on, with renewed eagerness.

"Precisely," I said.

"It's a magnificent idea," he remarked. "I wish I had thought of it."

Here he was again rung up. "You see what a life I lead!" he said, as he prepared for business.

"And perhaps give parties in?" he suggested, when the call was over.

"Yes," I replied.

"Splendid!" he said. "Well, if it's for children, I'll do everything in my power to help you and quickly too. Such a father as you must have preferential treatment."

Here the telephone bell rang again and the same performance was enacted.

"What was I saying?" he asked as he hung up the receiver.

"You were saying that fathers must have preferential treatment," I said. "But it is my luck to be only an uncle."

"That's better still," he said. "Uncles can so often do what fathers only wish to do and can't afford. And where would you want the *wagon-lit* to be sent? Always provided there is one."

"They live on your line," I said. "That's why I came to you. Near Newbury. I should have to get you to deliver it there, and I would arrange for it to be hauled out to their home."

"You'll want a brick foundation," he said. "I'll let you have exact measurements and then the builders can be getting on with it. Always provided," he added again, "that there is a sleeping car available."

"I have very little doubt as to that," I said.

"And how much would you be prepared to pay?" he asked.

"Whatever is just," I said.

"He's not an uncle," he confided to the room at large: "he's a fairy godfather."

It was the prettiest compliment I ever received. But as I have never seen any fun in wearing borrowed plumes, I explained that the present wasn't from me but from Geneva.

"That makes me the more interested," he replied.

"I suppose all those telephone rings were genuine?" I asked, as I rose to go.

"Surely," he said. "Didn't you hear the conversations?"

"But it wouldn't be a bad way to get rid of a bore: to be rung up by arrangement from your clerk's room?" I remarked.

He smiled. "It is the best way," he said, with a wink.

"And when am I likely to hear about the *wagon-lit*?" I asked.

"I am going into the matter at once," he said. "There is no time like the present—and," he added, "no present to compare with a *wagon-lit* for a family of children."

A wit as well as a pundit!

That evening I looked in on Giles and told him how I had been spending Christmas. "You ought to have been with me," I said.

"Most certainly not," he replied. "Too many kids. They make such a row."

"That's chiefly why I went," I said.

"Yes, but you're a freak. I'm a sensible feller."

"How are the horses running?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't follow jumpin'," he said. "Flat racin' is all I care about. I haven't looked at a horse's name for months. By the way," he said, "how are you gettin' on with your search for a deservin' nephew? Have you found one?"

"Not yet," I said. "Not since the artist refused."

"Well, if they're no better than the poet you stuck me with, you never will."

"Then you took him into the office?" I exclaimed. It was like Giles not to tell me sooner. "That was very decent of you."

"I wish I hadn't," said Giles. "He's a dud. Relations always are. He's a dud poet too. My head clerk showed me some of his effusions. Don't even rhyme. Just prose, chopped up. I sent for him. 'Look here, young feller,' I said. 'This is a business house, not a philanthropic institution. It's true I took you on to please your uncle, but if you don't work you go. I hear very poor reports of you. You're scribblin' when you ought to be addin' up. You come late and you'd go early if you had the chance. You behave, in short, as though you were at the other end of a city career instead of just beginnin'.

" 'Let me tell you somethin',' I said (Giles continued). 'You profess to despise commerce because you're a poet. But it's a very good thing for a poet to have a nest-egg to sing over. You'll want to see the East—well, you must have money first. You'll probably fall in love—you can't be happily married without money. Money is power. In your case, money is liberty.' "

"My dear Giles," I said. "I didn't know you had it in you."

He compressed his lips complacently and stood a little higher.

"I don't like the feller," he said; "but since I had taken him on I felt it was up to me to try and make a man of him."

"I'm most awfully obliged to you," I said. "And so will Norah be."

"For God's sake don't mix me up with any woman," he exclaimed. "No grateful mothers, if you please. You give me the cold shudders."

"But let me tell you how I finished with the poet," he resumed. "'Now listen to me,' I said—and I swear to you, Cav., I've never talked to a clerk like this in my life, and never shall again—I'm goin'

to give you another chance. If there are any complaints of lateness or neglect of work, during the next month, out you go; and it will count against you to have left Beckett and Frith, I can tell you. But if you come punctually, and never do any of your own scribblin' in my time and on my writin' paper, I'll not only keep you but give you a rise. Not that you're worth it, but to encourage you to be worth it.' "

It was on my tongue to say that Selwyn's only idea of being with Giles at all was to make some money quickly and then leave him in order to get to America; but I refrained. It would only have infuriated Giles, and there was no harm in his showing a little interest in some one besides himself. And there was always the chance that the boy might be stirred to play the game.

I must admit that I was tickled at the idea of Giles being let down. So all I said was, "I think that's splendid!"

"There are only two more on my list," I added, "and I'm seeing one of them on Friday: Donald Stanton. He's become an actor. Will you go with me?"

"Not I," he said. "I hate the theatre. It ruins your dinner. If I dine before eight I'm not hungry, and then I don't digest. I like to eat my dinner slowly, with a bottle of wine and a cigar after it, and by the time I've finished, the play's half over. This country isn't civilized. Theatres should never begin before nine."

"I should have liked your opinion of young Stanton," I said.

"You can have it now," he replied. "He's a rotter. Bein' an actor he must be."

CHAPTER XXIV

IN WHICH WE GO BEHIND THE SCENES

I OUGHT to say that Donald Stanton was one of the two sons of Genevra's sister Anne. As boys, when they were at Eton, they had often spent Long Leave with us, as their home was in Yorkshire. They were nice jolly boys. Cyril, I think, was the elder, Donald the younger.

After the death of Genevra's sister we had lost sight of the father for some while. None of the family were at Genevra's funeral.

Phoebe Muir had told me that Cyril was a curate in the East End, while Donald was the promising young actor whom I probably had seen under the name of Roland Murchison. He was now, I ascertained from one of those offices where they have the best seats, in *The Balkan Princess* at the Fatuity.

I remembered his name, but whether because I had witnessed one of his performances or because I had seen it in theatrical advertisements, I could not say: one reads so many names—when waiting, for example, for Tube trains—that one acquires a spurious familiarity with them. All I knew for certain was that I had no notion that the family comprised anyone so Bohemian, and that it was my duty to see him now, even though the title of the piece was calculated to excite one's worst forebodings. The stage has never had a very powerful lure for me,

but that lure is at its weakest when musical comedy with Near East accessories is in the bill.

Giles being useless as a companion, I called on Vaddy, hoping to get him: but he too declined. He had bridge to play: couldn't get out of it. I had not seen him for a long while, and I was shocked by his appearance. The fitness that Spain had given him was lost, and he seemed to be shakier and more nervous than before.

"Where have you been all this time?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, "I know I ought to have called. But to tell the truth, I couldn't. I couldn't bear the idea of the house without Jennie."

"I don't believe that's the real reason," I said. "I believe you thought I was going to be a nuisance by asking you questions and criticizing you."

He denied this, but without conviction, and I came away depressed.

In default of Giles and Vaddy I asked Judy Hill to dine early and go with me to the play.

Judy—when she was Lady Judy Flight—had been one of Giles' old flames, years ago, before he crystallized into the celibate and censor that he had since become. They were on the point of an engagement again and again, and then suddenly she married an American millionaire, and Giles disappeared saying that his heart was broken. He was next heard of at Monte Carlo trying to reduce the bank to the same condition.

I had not seen Judy, who did not allow her marriage to eliminate old friends, for some long time, but catching sight of her name in the report of a social function I rang her up at once, looking upon the chance as one of Fortune's happy thoughts.

"How is Giles?" was her first question. "I haven't seen him for an age. Is he still good-looking?"

"The same as ever," I said. And I gave her an account of him.

"Not bald?"

"Thinning, but still more or less thatched," I said. "And he still has Herbert."

"Isn't he priceless?" was her comment. "It's a lucky thing for us both that we didn't marry. He'd have been so tired of me and I should have been so tired of him. He never had any patience, even when he thought he was in love. But I should like to see him again: he's too good to lose. And he would do Van good. Van dresses so badly; Giles might stimulate him."

I told her about the reason for going to the theatre to see such a deplorable play.

"That's fun!" she said. "But don't apologize for the play. I love musical comedy. I love everything in a theatre."

And she did. She was one of those women who laugh at everything that comes across the footlights and, in a theatre, have no critical faculty whatever. There were coarse jokes, there were stolen jokes, there were jokes that had no fun in them whatever; and Judy rewarded each with the same facile, placid, punctual cachinnation. Even the male chorus, that set me groaning, failed to offend her. Her lazy contentment helped to explain the amazing success of these entertainments. She took it like a drug: all her native cleverness and discrimination were converted to an unquestioning receptivity.

I don't know what private problems might vex her, what domestic difficulties she might have to return to, what her relations were with her not too tractable American husband; but at the moment she was having an evening off. And that of course is the theatre's strength—that it offers evenings off

to tired and harassed people : an anodyne. I was very foolish, I realized, not to be able to be as easily pleased.

Donald, who played one of the two lovers in the piece, appeared to be a good-looking fellow, and his agility was remarkable ; but there is something to me antipathetic in the sight of a presentable and presumably vigorous young man, covered with paint, capering about the stage, in the company of scores of *décolletée* girls ; and the spectacle is the less agreeable when the caperer is one's nephew, although only by marriage.

That girls should be painted and should caper seems (oddly enough and wrongly enough !) reasonable ; but stalwart young men, no. However, caper they do, more and more, and caper they will ; so there it is. The general play-going public sees nothing anomalous ; and long ago I came to the conclusion that I was too particular to count.

Lady Judy, at any rate, saw nothing amiss. She thought Donald delightful and said so repeatedly.

" You must bring him to lunch," she said. " Actors never dine, but one can catch them at lunch now and then. What a fascinating boy ! "

It was the usual kind of play, with the usual kind of vulgarity and rather embarrassing intimacies. Again I must do the rest of the audience the justice of exempting them from any of the hyper-delicate distaste that I experienced. The mass of play-goers apparently are never so happy as when they are spectators of public amours. They like to see young men kissing and embracing strange women in a spot light, and singing passionate songs into each other's mouths. To me it is all repellent : it makes me hot and nervous.

The principal lover, to whom belonged the inevit-

able waltz tune continually breaking out all through—the foundation stone of the play, in fact—was a robust tenor; Donald was a light baritone with just enough voice for the purpose. The tenor indeed might get an engagement at Queen's Hall or the Albert Hall on any Sunday afternoon; but Donald never. While the tenor was singing "I'll Sing Thee Songs of Araby," Donald would be playing golf at Walton Heath.

At the end of the performance Lady Judy went off alone, and I sent my card to Mr. Murchison and soon after was led to his dressing-room, where he greeted me with effusion. The last time I had been in his company was at a cricket match on the Fourth of June, when he was still at school, and he had made a score. The contrast between the freshness of his flushed and excited face then and these features plastered with grease paint and powder, and with darkened eyes, was almost like a blow. But I could see that underneath he had altered very little: he was still gay and impulsive.

I said that I had heard who Roland Murchison really was and thought I should like to meet him again.

He thanked me very heartily. Then he expressed the hope that his aunt Genevra was going strong.

I told him that she had died ten months ago.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Rough luck! I suppose I ought to have known; but one gets out of touch with family affairs. I've been on tour till quite recently. How do you like the show?"

I said that it wasn't much in my line, but it was lively and every one seemed to be pleased with it.

"Have a spot," he said. He turned to his dresser. "William," he said, "give Mr. Beckett a whisky and soda."

"Poor Aunt Genevra!" he said, as he attacked his glass. "That's hard lines. She was always jolly nice to me." He sighed. "Life's a mystery," he said and finished the drink.

The dressing-room was small and hot and too brightly lighted, and the walls and table were covered with framed photographs; while more, unframed, were stuck into the edges of the mirror. Some of them represented Mr. Roland Murchison in various parts, but more were of fellow actors and actresses, all inscribed with messages of affection, while a number of telegrams pinned to a screen wished dear old Roland the best on his recent opening night.

It was all very friendly and I could see how attractive this easy camaraderie of the theatre must be and what pleasant times one can have if one is wholly of it. To be an actor and have no other ambition must, unless one is a dismal failure, make for almost continual beguilement: one becomes a straw on the tide; time does not exist, except the hour of the rehearsal or the performance; letters do not exist; responsibilities (I almost wrote) do not exist, and one need never be lonely. And then the recompense! Applause and laughter for two to three hours every day and more at matinées; the electric invigorating atmosphere of the playhouse.

The actor and the singer and the orator—these alone get their reward as they work. The rest of the world must wait for it or go without.

The other side of the medal is less bright. The actor, by reason of his employment, gradually ceases to be himself at all: he is continually somebody else; he makes a business of cheeriness and good fellowship; gregariousness becomes a dominating necessity, so that he is restless everywhere but among

his stage companions talking shop. "Actors," somebody once said to me, "are always pleased to see you, but they sink no roots." And that, I think, is their tragedy. They sink no roots. Their homes are places to leave.

CHAPTER XXV

IN WHICH THE PLOT THICKENS

MY Great Western friend was as good as his word, and in the course of three weeks I had an official communication stating that an obsolete sleeping-car, 57 feet long, was at my disposal and I could see it by appointment.

I saw it in the company of a young engineer. It may have been only 57 feet long, which is shorter than the present model, but it looked like Pall Mall. I was appalled.

"Do you mean to say that this can be transported from Newbury station to a distance of five miles?" I asked.

"Easily," said the young engineer. "All you want is a timber wagon."

I breathed again; the task had appeared quite impossible to me. And then we explored it and I was enchanted. It had eleven little rooms with sleeping berths, and an attendant's room at the end. Each berth had a washing basin and numberless little dodgy contrivances and a sliding door. The whole was lighted by gas, and the young engineer told me it would be easy to put gas into the attendant's room if the pipes were adjacent. In the modern cars there was, of course, electric light. In the attendant's room was a device for simple cooking.

It was now the end of January. The next thing to do was to take Belle into the secret and arrange

for the brick foundation to be built in the wood, some plausible explanation of which could be given to the children. Then during the Easter holidays, when they were all away at their paternal grandmother's at Tunbridge Wells, the sleeping car could be set in position, ready to bowl them out on their return.

The young engineer threw himself into the project with all the keenness of a boy, and he promised me so exact a specification for the builder that no error could creep in, with drawings of the stone steps needed at each end—for there were only the two doors. Once in, you found your room by walking along the corridor.

Everything was very compact, naturally: this corridor was only 2 feet $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, while the compartments were 4 feet 5 inches one way and 6 feet $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches the other, and 7 feet high. But limited space is no drawback to children. Indeed, it is because their toys are in miniature that they like them so.

"How many children are there?" the young engineer asked.

I told him there were five.

"That will leave six rooms over," he said. "But it will be easy to turn two into one in case they wanted a common-room or a sitting-room for their mother."

"A very good idea," I said.

"And a spare room for you," he added.

"Not so good," I said. "I like a big bed."

"Well, for a cousin who is not so particular," he suggested.

I must admit that the presence of two or three builders' men in the wood, first making immensely long trenches and filling them with concrete, and then laying immensely long lines of bricks on the

concrete, needed a good deal of glossing over on the part of my sister, who is not naturally a very gifted liar. The head builder too, on his occasional visits, had to exercise all his wits to resist the cross-examination to which the family subjected him.

Old Peters, the gardener, was in a more difficult position, being so constantly accessible. But he took refuge in laughter; which is not a bad protection. No matter what he was asked about it, he laughed.

The result was successful, for whatever else they might suspect, no one had the faintest idea that a section of the Cornish Riviera Express was proposing to spend the rest of its days in the seclusion of the Trevor property.

The notion of a rifle range for the nearest village, somehow getting about, was very useful. Rifle ranges were not uncommon, and the village had none. I rather fancy that it was the young engineer, riding down on his motor bicycle one Sunday to look at the work, who started the rumour. Anyway, it held the field—and not unreasonably; for the proportions of the proposed structure favoured it, while what could be more natural than that Mrs. Trevor, wishing to commemorate her husband the Colonel, should resort to a military form of memorial?

“But, Mother, if it's going to be a rifle saloon, Avril asked, “won't it be horrid hearing the guns going off?”

“May I shoot in it?” Noel wished to know; nothing else.

“Will they have a running man?” Bish was very anxious on this point, possibly scenting danger for a small boy only too much accustomed to doing the family's odd jobs and errands.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN WHICH DEEDS PREVAIL OVER FAITH

HAVING seen Donald, I thought that I could not do better than quickly see his brother. Donald obviously was no claimant for Genevra's money. She would not wish it to go to an actor, I felt sure; should such a candidate prove his case it could only be a tragedian in distress. I could hear Genevra murmuring, "If only Donald didn't have to dance with those girls!"

I don't think she was narrow. She merely had the old-fashioned view that actors ought to spring from other people: not from one's own. Until I met Donald—or Roland—I shared it; but there was something very attractive about the young man, something very bright and insouciant, something of that other strange land to which he belonged both by nature and by choice—Bohemia. I found myself envying him not a little—both his youth and his careless grace, although, one felt, that might so easily turn to careless disgrace.

The same family has before now, I am sure, produced both an actor and a clerk in holy orders, but it cannot be a common occurrence; and I was interested to discover how like these boys still were.

The farther I proceeded towards Hoxton the more I was predisposed in the Reverend Cyril's favour, for, I thought, surely there must be the real stuff in any young man who can live among these mean streets.

Being myself peculiarly susceptible to surroundings and liable to the profoundest depression when amidst any kind of squalor, I have the tendency to assume that others are the same. But of course—and we ought to learn it sooner than we do : it ought to be written up on the blackboard every morning in schools—no people are the same. As I am sure has been said, one man's poison is another man's meat almost as often as one man's meat is another man's poison.

When at last I found Cyril in what he called his digs—in a long street in which every house on both sides was precisely like its neighbour and its *vis à vis*—I realized that he was the possessor of a complete and useful insensitiveness to environment. He carried his own atmosphere.

His sitting-room was almost as full of photographs as his brother's dressing-room, but these photographs were of athletes : cricketers, footballers, pugilists. I looked in vain for a feminine face.

Cyril was a handsome, hearty young fellow, well set up, springy, the picture of health and condition. "*Mens sana in corpore sano*," he said later in the day : "that's the best motto in the world," and there was every indication that he lived up to it.

He asked me if I objected to his pipe ; and on my saying no he lit it and made himself comfortable very much as he must have done when he was at Brasenose. Indeed, but for the scene outside the windows, we might have been in his college rooms. He did not seem to have expanded much mentally either. Some men go through life as undergraduates and Cyril looked like being among them.

We talked about many things and he was brisk and hearty all the time. His voice rarely became professional, although I caught the inflexion when he referred to his aunt Genevra's death.

"You are happy here?" I asked.

"It's all right," he said. "I'm frightfully busy, and that keeps you fit and shuts out dreary thoughts. And then it's so easy to get to the West End and see what's going on."

I asked him if he had seen Donald in *The Balkan Princess*.

He said he hadn't. He preferred a straight play. He rather thought it was a mistake for Donald to be in that thing at all; he ought to stick to the legitimate drama. "But you see," he added, "Donald likes the fun of it. Singing and dancing are probably more amusing than just speaking, and he was always out for amusement."

"Do you regret his choice of a career?" I asked.

"I do rather," he said. "It's a great loss too, because he's such a good cricketer. He ought to be playing for his county. Somehow I always feel that it's a mistake when an actor is an athlete too. One feels that the physically unfit could be doing all that for us. The whole business—stuffey theatres, late hours, make-up,—is against the idea of fitness. But there, it has a terrible fascination and Donald has succumbed to it."

"On the other hand," I said, "actors are the fittest people going. They don't look strong, but they must be. They may not be equal to any sudden physical effort, but their average of health is amazing. They're never ill. They turn night into day and day into night; they are notably convivial; but they're never ill. Wonderful fellows!"

"It's true," he said. "The stage," he added, "never had any appeal for me."

"What does appeal to you?" I asked.

"Oh, I shall stick to the Church," he said. "I am hoping for some kind of preferment any day."

I'll get a living somewhere, for certain, even if I have to be a curate again first. I have very good friends."

I asked him if he deliberately chose the Church.

"No," he said. "I was put there. It was arranged. Mother wanted it."

"And you believe?" I asked. "You must forgive such a question," I added, "but you are so frank that I am sure you would say what you felt; and I am interested. Think of me as your mother's brother-in-law, with the horrible licence that relations consider their right."

"I believe that a parson can be a very useful member of the community," he said. "To tell you the truth, I think as little as I can about beliefs. I'm out for conduct and, through it, happiness. The practical side—that's what I rely on, you see. I was a padre in the War and loved the work. It was all practical there: no room for theology; visiting, reading aloud, joking as much as possible, burying. Plenty of burying. One couldn't enlarge much on the New Testament with shells bursting all round. At least, I couldn't."

"But now," I asked, "in a parish, among women?"

"It's very different," he said. "Difficult too. I try to keep to the boys and young men as much as I can. I try to be practical again. I run the club, you know. Boxing, football, cricket, all kinds of outdoor things, and beyond that I can't look." It was then that he made the remark about *Mens sana*.

"But your sermons?" I asked. "Isn't that difficult?"

"Yes, they're a problem," he said. "But I don't preach much. The vicar likes to do it himself. When I have to, I manage to dodge the snags. I enlarge on the cheerful life: give and take, kindness, decency."

"I think that's wise," I said. "But you could do all that without being in orders, without having subscribed to so many beliefs you don't hold."

"Hardly," he said. "They are two very different things, speaking with the authority of the Church behind you, and speaking without it. The people wouldn't pay half the attention if I were in mufti; in fact they wouldn't come to hear me at all."

"You don't feel yourself to be a humbug?" I asked. "Mind," I added, "I'm not criticizing: I merely want to know. It's all very interesting. And I have a reason."

"If I wasn't so busy, I might," he said. "But I'm always at it. My time's filled. To-day, for example, I've had a wedding and two funerals. People needn't perhaps be married; but you'll agree that they must be buried. That's necessary work and a large part of a parson's duty is to do it decently. If every parson were debarred from burying people because he had doubts about the first chapter of Genesis, or the story of the Flood, or the Immaculate Conception, what would become of dead bodies?"

"No one," he went on, "hates hypocrisy more than I do, but there has to be compromise. And there's the other side too. Too much belief would be crippling. For instance, if I thought that every word that our Lord said should be taken literally, I couldn't have been a padre at all. Many and many a young man have I helped to overcome his cowardice and fight the foe—and how could a true disciple of Christ bring himself to do that? I've even argued with Conscientious Objectors! That's a bit thick, isn't it?"

"All the same," he continued, "if any one like you were to say to me that you thought I was doing more harm than good by affecting to believe what

I didn't believe and wearing the livery of religion while not subscribing to it, I should go into the matter very carefully. But no one ever asked me about it before. It has been my own secret. All the same," he said, "I know that I have been useful. I don't want to boast, but I know that I have some influence for good here, especially among the boys. But I wonder what Aunt Genevra would have thought."

"Yes, that's what I have been wondering," I said.

CHAPTER XXVII

IN WHICH THE WOOD GIVES UP ITS SECRET

IN response to Belle's urgent request, I met the party at Victoria on their return from Tunbridge Wells and after giving them, at the Grosvenor Hotel, all the lunch they could consume—or, at any rate, had time to consume—I accompanied them to Newbury. I must be there, Belle had insisted, when the discovery was made.

Among the great moments of life must be counted that one when five excitable children see for the first time a *wagon-lit*, fifty-seven feet long and all their own, to play in, and even live their own lives in remote from grown-up influence, securely established in their own wood only a few yards from their real home. Any reader of these lines who has had a similar experience will probably corroborate the statement that the feeling of exaltation, supremacy and success, is something terrific.

The unveiling—so to speak—was very well stage-managed. We reached my sister's house somewhere about five-thirty, approaching by a circuitous route, so as to avoid passing the wood and catching any too-previous glimpse through the trees. Such a deviation from the normal way could hardly escape the notice of so many alert intelligences, and it was left to me to supply a conjecture as to the main road being under repair—an invention for which I hope

for forgiveness from the Recording Angel. None could be whiter, anyway.

The servants had been warned by letter to divulge nothing, but if ever faces told a tale of suppressed secrecy, theirs did.

We had a hasty tea, every care being taken to shepherd the flock well within the dining-room fold, and then Belle suggested a walk in the wood to see if there were any bluebells yet.

Fortunately, at the entrance to the enclosure where the *wagon-lit* had been placed, there is a shrubbery of evergreens, dating from the eighteenth century, through which nothing can be seen ; so that on rounding it we had the *coup d'œil* in all its suddenness and glory.

For a few seconds the children were dumb. Their mouths were open, but no sound escaped.

Then Bish cried, "It's a train! Mother, what train can it be?"

"I think it's your train," said Belle. "It's a present from Uncle Cavanagh."

And at these words they fell on it, rushed into the door at one end, leaned out of the corridor windows shouting unintelligible encomiums, examined every room, appropriated every room, dragged us to see what room they had appropriated, and generally went mad.

I took very little part in the discussion on the name of the new house, which set in directly we had returned from the tour of inspection ; but it was fun to listen to it.

That it must have a name and have it at once was essential.

"What do you suggest, Uncle Cav.?" Avril asked.

"I'll tell you later," I said. "I want to hear all the suggestions first."

Noel thought that Sleeping-Car Terrace would be a good name; but Avril was against that.

"You can't have a terrace in a wood," she said.

"But if there is a terrace in a wood, what then?" Noel inquired in a cold voice. He was no fonder of contradiction than you are.

"Yes," said Avril, who could stick to her guns too, "but even if there is a terrace in a wood it doesn't follow that we ought to say so. Directly you say terrace you spoil the wood." Avril was something of a poet.

"Could you call it the Alms Houses?" asked Eggles. "It would be just like a row of alms houses except that instead of old, old men and women we should all be young."

"That's rather a mouldy idea," said Noel. "This ought to be such a jolly place and you want to mix it up with beef tea and rheumatism."

"I think so too," said Avril. "Holiday House is much more the name we want; but that isn't quite right, because it's not one house but a lot."

"What about Holiday Row," Noel asked. "I'm very careful not to say terrace again, I hope you notice."

"Don't you think Open House would be rather nice?" Jane suggested. "Then people would know that we should be glad if they called. It would be nice to have tea or ginger beer always ready in case anyone dropped in."

"Oh, Jane, how clever of you!" Avril exclaimed. "Of course that's the idea—Open House."

"Perhaps you'll tell me," Noel inquired, again in his cold voice, "where the money is coming from to provide for this constant entertainment. Jane may have hidden treasure, but as for me, I get fourpence a week, and you can't keep Open House on that."

"Mother would let us have cakes and things," said Avril.

"Oh!" said Mother. "In reason, yes. But not for every passer-by."

"Well," said Noel, "I hope I'm not mean, but we must be practical. It would be much more fun if the people paid us for their food."

"Like an inn," said Avril.

"Yes—why," Noel went on excitedly, "we might call it an inn. What are inns called?—The King's Head, The White Hart, The Angel, The Red Lion."

"Do let's call it The George and Dragon," said Bish, "and have a picture of it, like the one at Rappenham."

"No," said Avril, "we ought to have a name all our own."

"What about The Cavanagh's Head?" said Noel.

"Certainly not," I insisted.

"If you don't have George and Dragon," said Bish appealingly, "do have something that would make a picture. I love pictures on sign-boards. There's a topping Swan with Two Necks at Larbridge."

"But who would paint it?" Jane inquired.

"I think I could get it painted," I said, thinking of Alistair and Rose.

"Or we might call it A Home from Home," said Jane. "I've seen hotels with that after them."

"That's silly," said Noel. "The idea of a hotel being a home is rot. You go to it because you're tired of home. Homes don't have lifts."

"Or grill rooms," said Bish. "What is a grill room?" he asked plaintively.

"We might call it The Cavanagh Arms," said Eggles.

"Eggles has got arms on the brain," said Bish.

"Only this time," said Eggles, "they're not spelt with an L. Ha! ha!"

"The Cavanagh Arms is great," said Noel. "Don't you think so, Uncle Cav.? You gave it to us and it would be just right to call it after you."

"No," I said. "Not The Cavanagh Arms. It's your Aunt Jennie's gift, not mine. If you decide to call it arms at all—and I don't think it's a bad idea—I think I should like you to call it The Thorold Arms, after her."

"And over the door," said Bish, "it will have our names and say 'Licensed to be drunk on the premises,' like it does at The Blue Boar."

"If anyone comes, we must look after them," said Jane. "And give them beer."

"If you keep beer there," said Noel, "old Peters will never do another stroke of work."

"But we can't give them beer," said Avril, in a shocked voice. "We can give them coffee, though. All good inns have rooms called Coffee Rooms. I've seen them."

"I wish there was a bar," said Bish. "Goldie would make a beautiful barmaid, with her red hair."

"I rather fancy Bish as a pot-boy myself," said Noel. "With a green baize apron."

"Being an inn won't stop us from having rooms all to ourselves, will it, Uncle Cav.?" asked Jane apprehensively.

"I don't think it should," I said. "You only call it an inn. You can keep one room for visitors if you like. There are enough. I might like to stay there myself when I want a home from home."

And so the meeting broke up.

As we were going out, Avril put her arm through mine. "Do you mind telling me," she asked, "what your own original idea for a name was?"

"The Thorold Arms," I said.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN WHICH A GOOD SAMARITAN GAMBLES

I THOUGHT much of Vaddy's relapse, not a little blaming myself for seeing so little of him since we came back from Spain.

After failing to find any other way out, I consulted Rendle Vaux.

Rendle had known Genevra's family long enough for the frankest talk to be possible.

"I'm worried," I said. "Vaddy."

"Ah yes, Vaddy," said Rendle. "He was with us in November. He's not too happy a man. Is there anything serious?"

"How did he strike you when he was staying with you?" I asked.

"He seemed fairly fit. A little abstracted now and then, perhaps."

"You didn't think he was drinking too much?" I asked.

"No," he said.

"Well, he is," I said, and I told what I knew.

"That's bad," he said. "But something might be possible. Poor Genevra, how miserable it would have made her! Something must be done. Let me think about it, will you? I'll ask him to lunch any-way."

Sir Rendle was famous for his cellar, as for his walls. He had a few of the choicest pictures and much of the choicest wine.

"Well, go slow with those famous vintages of yours," I said. "Don't do him too well."

"Hang it all!" he replied. "What is one to do? I can't invite a man to my house and not give him the best. I couldn't do such a thing." He laughed. "I tried to do it once," he explained, "but I failed. It was at my place on the river, years ago, and I had asked a lot of city men who were mixed up with me, to come down in the afternoon and go out in a launch and then dine. I knew them only in business and didn't care much for any of them; and when I left for town in the morning I gave instructions for certain wines, not the very best, to be got out. Well, all the way to town I found myself worrying about this, and directly I reached Paddington I sent a wire to the butler telling him he must produce the best only. Pride, of course—no virtue; but I had to do it."

"Vaddy wants some protection," I said.

"I'm sorry," said Vaux, "but again I ask, What is one to do? You can't ask me to insult him by saying 'I've ordered Vichy for you.' Men aren't children."

"Oh, aren't they?" I said. "But the tragedy is that they can't be treated as such. Our whole social system conspires against a teetotaller. No one does anything to help him, even when he has always been one; but the new zealot, converted yesterday, has the deuce of a time. Apart from the incredulity and the ridicule with which his old associates greet his protestations, he has to face the actual difficulty of getting anything else to drink. The insipidity of ordinary English household water is abominable, while in a restaurant the charge for a small bottle of any mineral is too monstrous to encourage."

"Vaddy will be with friends, anyway," said Vaux.

Afterwards he gave me a fairly good idea of what had happened.

Vaddy arrived, red about the eyes and a little shaky about the hand and terribly in need of the physical as well as moral support that convivialists can derive from lunch. It was after lunch that he began to live again; the world to him was new not every morning but every afternoon. In the morning it was a grey and hopeless place made for the despondent to endure in. But after lunch, when the roseate hues touched the mountain peaks once more, it was fit for heroes, like himself, to live in : broad-minded, tolerant, generous men, with souls above trifles and a great contempt for craven-hearted, whey-faced pessimists.

"Look here, Vaddy," said Vaux. "I want to have a talk with you. Lunch won't be for a quarter of an hour yet : I asked you too early on purpose."

Vaddy groaned.

"Do you mind," Vaux went on, "if we talk now ? It's more or less business."

"Business ?" Vaddy echoed blankly. He had no use for business, and enormous need of drink and food.

"In a way, yes," said Vaux.

"But I'm not a business man," said Vaddy. "I've retired. I know nothing of money."

"All the same," said Vaux, "I want to talk to you."

"Then do you mind if I have a whisky and soda first ?"

"My dear Vaddy," said Vaux, "of course you can. I'll ring for it. But just a minute. You know I was very fond of your sister."

"Of course," said Vaddy.

"Your twin," said Vaux.

"My twin," said Vaddy.

"And you and I have always been good friends?" said Vaux.

"Always," said Vaddy.

"Then you won't mind if I'm a little frank?" said Vaux.

"I don't mind anything," said Vaddy, "if you'll give me that whisky and soda."

"He's bringing it," said Vaux. "It's ordered. But before you have it do you mind if I say a word or two about it?"

Vaddy passed his hand over his eyes in perplexity complete. The whole thing was getting to be too much for him. Lunch not ready. Business conversation. Whisky and soda, in such a house as that, famous for its hospitality, made not only a matter of postponement but a subject of discussion. He was lost.

"Well?" Vaddy asked.

"I want to say a friendly word about whiskys and sodas before lunch," said Vaux.

"Oh!" said Vaddy. "I see. This is a temperance meeting. You're going to convert me. Wounded in the house of one's friends, by George!" He rose and moved towards the door.

Sir Rendle detained him.

"No, my dear man, nothing of the sort." He laid his hand on Vaddy's shoulder. "Nothing of the sort. There is no teetotalism here, and I trust there never will be. I don't want to convert you, I only want to help you. Because, you know—and you promised not to be offended with me if I talked plainly, and I assure you I'm just as vulnerable myself in other ways: our temptations are different, that's all. I happen to hate the taste of whisky, too. Now you mustn't be offended, but you must know you are a little in need of help. You have let this thing get a little too far. May I go on?"

"Yes," said Vaddy, sinking into his chair, "do. I know all about it. It's no news to me. You don't suppose I'm such a fool as that. What kind of awakenings do you think I have? Jolly ones? Merry ones? Springing like a lark out of bed and all the rest of it? My God, no! But what is one to do? There's the stuff and one drinks it.

"And it's probable," he continued, and Vaux laughed when he told me this, "that I like it more than others do, because it is such a change to me after the Spartan life I led when I was younger. You, Rendle, never had to rough it; but I can assure you I knew years when nothing but beer ever passed my lips. I couldn't afford anything else.

"Anyhow," he said, "I have grown to be very fond of it now, I admit. I like the after effects. I like the mellow feeling. I like the benevolence that creeps over me, the tolerance, the sympathetic understanding. Probably it's none of these things: the benevolence is sentiment, the tolerance is blunted perception, the sympathetic understanding is a contented muzziness; but at the time it all seems perfect and oneself a god. Up there, you know. Above all the littleness, the pettiness, the squalor of life.

"That's why one drinks, especially when one has no one at home to return to. Not that I'm unhappy because I'm alone; don't think that. Loneliness suits me part of the day; after that I want society, and the society I have fallen among is composed of men who put it away like blazes."

"That's all right," said Vaux. "Let them. And perhaps they can stand it better than you. We're all different. But the thing is, don't let yourself be dragged down by it. Don't lose your self-respect."

"I hope I haven't done that," said Vaddy.

"No, I'm sure you haven't. But you've thrown

up a sponge or two, haven't you? You are not using your head as you ought. You're only fifty. You're not using your personality as you ought. You're sacrificing everything to club talk, club cards and club drink."

"I believe you're right," said Vaddy. "But I can't stand another minute of this unless you give me something to buck me up."

Sir Rendle rang the bell again. He had arranged with his butler not to answer it before.

"That's better," said Vaddy, as he drained the glass. "By George, if you knew how I wanted that! Now I shall be all right."

"Yes," said Vaux, "but that isn't the way. I want you—all your real friends want you—to take up some work again, something that will interest you so much that you will want to keep your brain keen and your health sound."

"Too late," said Vaddy.

"Not a bit of it," said Vaux. "You're gloomy about yourself now because you've been overdoing it with late nights and mixing things. Give yourself a chance to rally; go out of London for a bit and take some exercise. I'm going to Hunstanton next week to play golf. Come too. After a fortnight of that you'll be as fit as a fiddle and ready for anything. But now we'll have lunch."

Vaddy, Rendle told me, was very silent at lunch and very temperate. He was occupied with his own thoughts, as his host had hoped he would be. And as Lady Vaux was not present—they were quite alone—it did not matter.

The only thing that cheered him up was when Vaux talked about Vaddy's tour with a pupil years before. Where did he take the boy? he asked.

Vaddy gave the route.

"Was it fun?"

"Yes. But we didn't do the best things; I can see that now. We never went to Burma, for example. And we ought to have allowed time for going up-country in China—to Canton, at any rate. Just messing about at Hong-Kong and Shanghai, which are hardly more Chinese than San Francisco, was absurd."

When lunch was over and they had their cigars, Vaux returned to the theme.

"Would you care to travel again?" he asked.

"Too late," said Vaddy. "I couldn't go alone, and no one would entrust a boy to me now. I've done for myself there."

"I don't agree," said Vaux. "As a matter of fact I know some one who has a boy of seventeen for whom he wishes a year's travel and who would be delighted if you would take him."

"If I would?" said Vaddy, lighting up. But immediately he darkened again. "No, too late, too late," he said. "Directly he heard about me he would withdraw."

"But he has heard about you," said Vaux. "He knows it all and he wants you to take the boy in your charge."

"Who on earth is it?" Vaddy asked in amazement.

"As a matter of fact it's myself," said Vaux. "I invited you here to-day to ask you to do me the great kindness of travelling for a year with my boy."

Vaddy was overcome.

"You want me," he said at last, "to take charge of your son? Knowing all about me as you do, you would still entrust him to me? But you can't mean it."

"Yes, I do," said Vaux. "I mean it absolutely. I have thought about it for a long time."

"I see," said Vaddy. "It's a trick. The result of a conspiracy of kindness. But I won't let you run such risks. I might go from bad to worse, what then?"

"But you won't," said Vaux. "Anyway, I am prepared to take the chance. There is no one in the world whom I could trust, as I trust you, as a companion for him, wise and understanding and gentle."

"Wise?" exclaimed Vaddy. "My God! Wise?"

"Yes, wise for others, and, with a responsibility such as this, wise for yourself. Will you do it for me? I want you to take him about the world just where you think he ought to go, and train his mind and his observation. For a year, say. You did it before and you know the ropes. Will you do this for me?"

"Only if you assure me that you ask it with your eyes wide open."

"Wide open. Alive to every risk. Yes," said Vaux.

"I'll do it," said Vaddy. "And you shan't repent it."

CHAPTER XXIX

IN WHICH A TRAVELLER IS BAFFLED

I NEVER saw Giles so happily and innocently pleased as when I told him about The Thorold Arms.

"That's what I call a present worth havin'," he said. "I wish I'd thought of it. I've never given Belle's children anything that I can remember. Shock-in'. I'll run down and see 'em one day. It's shameful how London gets hold of you and keeps you from doin' the right things by your relations. Now that her husband's dead I don't mind goin'. I never liked the feller."

The next time I was at Belle's I heard about Giles's visit; but first I ought to say something about the Historic Customer. For in spite of what I had called a most unlikely occurrence, a *bona fide* traveller did actually arrive at the inn.

It was Bish who discovered him. And as it was on the morning of the races, and they were always warned to be especially careful at race times, he was terrified.

He had been wandering in the wood in his usual absent-minded way when he heard a noise that sounded like knocking. Then there were shouts of "Hullo, hullo! Open the door! Open the door!"

Creeping towards The Thorold Arms, he saw a man outside, hammering with his fist. He was a tall man with a big beard, black spectacles and a slouch hat, and he had a heavy stick.

Bish ran to the house for help, shaking with fright.

Avril was sewing in the garden. "Goldie, do come!" he gasped. "There's a man trying to get into The Thorold Arms."

"Where's Cardie?" said Avril. "He must come too. I wish Mother wasn't away. Go and find him."

Noel was soon found—he was washing Binks in one of the loose boxes. Never was a dog so pleased with an interruption.

When they reached the wood the stranger was still there; but he was sitting on the steps leaning against the wall, smoking a big pipe.

He looked up and growled. "Which of you is de landlord?" he asked in a gruff foreign voice.

The children looked at each other blankly. "The landlord?" Noel repeated.

"Yes, de landlord of dis inn." The man pointed to the sign-board. "The Thorold Arms," he said: "doesn't that mean it's an inn?"

"Ye-e-es, in a way," said Noel.

"What do you mean, 'in a way'?" the man asked. "An inn is either an inn or is nod an inn. If this is nod an inn you have no right to put up a sign-board and deceive beebles, especially when they have been a long dime on de road and are dired and hungry. Is id an inn?" he demanded sharply.

"Yes," said Avril, "it is." She couldn't bear, she said afterwards, to think that the first time a traveller came to The Thorold Arms its innishness should be denied.

But she was aghast when he said, "Very well then, I want some dinner and a bed."

Avril looked at Noel in dismay.

"Oh, but——" Noel began. "You see, just at the moment the inn is closed."

"For repairs," Avril added, by a brilliant inspira-

tion. And then, remembering a phrase she had seen pasted across windows, she added, "Under entirely new management."

Noel looked at her with admiration and alarm.

"Yes," he repeated, fascinated, "'Under entirely new management.'"

"What is wrong?" the stranger inquired.

"The—the drains," said Avril.

"Drains—nothing," said the man, who was now getting angry. "Inns cannot be glosed. It is contrary to law. A landlord has got to provide rest and refreshment for travellers or he loses his licence."

"But we haven't got a licence," said Noel, thinking that this would settle the matter.

"Ha!" said the man, "you geeep an inn withoud a licence! Oh, you do, do you?" He took out a note-book and began to write. "Do you know dat is a very serious matter. Do you know dat dere is a very heavy fine and punishment for dat offence. The bolice are very strict about it."

Avril seized Noel's hand, which trembled a little too, and Bish looked at the stranger in awe.

"Very serious," the man went on, in his deep foreign voice. Even without the black spectacles he would have been a terrifying object. "Virst you revuse vood and lodging to a *bona vide* traveller. What's *bona vide* mean?" he asked suddenly, of Valentine, thrusting his beard into the poor little frightened boy's face.

"I don't know," said the Bishop.

"Vorse and vorse," the man growled. "Here's a bublican who doesn't know the meaning of *bona vide*."

"But I'm not a publican," said Bish, although he was flattered to be called one.

"Yes you are," said the stranger. "You are one of the owners of dis inn, are you not?"

Bish admitted it. "That's my compartment," he said. "No. 5, with the pink curtain ribbon."

"Very well, then," said the man. "Then you are a publican. You're a sinner too, because you denied it."

At this Bish broke down. He knew what was the fate of sinners and he couldn't bear it.

"It's no use crying," said the man. "You're a publican and a sinner. And you're all sinners," he went on, "because you are breaking the law, virst revusing vood and lodging and then admitting that you geep an inn withoud a licence. I must rebort about this to the bolice."

Avril, who had been comforting Bish, here drew Noel aside and talked to him earnestly.

"If we open the inn for you," said Noel to the stranger, "and make you as comfortable as we can—in—in spite of the drains—"

"And without charging you anything," Avril threw in—

"Will you forget all about what we have done and haven't done, that is wrong, because really we aren't publicans at all. This is a kind of game, you know. An uncle of ours gave us a sleeping-car to play with."

"Yes, but we should be only too glad if you would use it as a real inn to-night," Avril added.

"Is the beer good?" the man asked.

"We—we haven't any beer," said Avril. "I'm very sorry, but we haven't any beer."

"We have ginger beer," said Bish. "Jolly fine stuff, too."

"Is there a joint of roast beef, underdone, with walnut pickles?" the man asked. He pronounced pickles biggles.

"If you'll give us half an hour," said Avril, "we'll get it all ready for you."

"Very well," said the man. "I will return then. The sheets must be well aired," he called back.

"Yes," said Avril.

"And don't forget the biggles."

"We'll do our best," said Avril.

And so he disappeared among the trees towards the road.

They went back to the house in consternation and put the case before the cook, and it was decided that the man should be asked to eat in the housekeeper's room. And the meal was got ready.

But he never came.

They waited and waited, but he never came.

The day's excitements were, however, not over. First there was their mother's return from Reading, where she had been with Jane and Egges to see the dentist, and of course they had to hear the whole story.

Mrs. Trevor was grave. "Why didn't you fetch Peters?" she asked.

"We wanted to do it all, alone," said Noel.

"You were very wrong," she told them. "Promise me always to get Peters if anything like this happens again. That is what Peters is for."

And then, about an hour after their mother's return, who should arrive, in a motor-car, with a wonderful bag, but Uncle Giles!

They had not seen him for years and they all looked with awe at this tall elegant man, with field glasses hanging over his shoulder, straight from the races, where the wicked people, against whom they had to guard the house, congregated twice every year.

But Uncle Giles did not look wicked; merely very grand, and smiling his odd smile.

They did not dare to go into his room when he was dressing or wait for him on the landing and make

him join in the Dinner Hymn. Not that they were exactly afraid of him, but he wasn't quite that sort. But at dinner itself something happened which established him, if not precisely as a favourite, as a possible playmate. For suddenly, turning to Bish, who was sitting just opposite, and scowling terribly, Uncle Giles said, in a deep foreign voice, "Where are dose biggles?"

A silence fell on the room. Then "Oh!" cried Avril, with a despairing gasp, "it was Uncle Giles all the time!"

"Uncle Giles!" exclaimed Noel. "How ripping to be so clever!"

And then the whole story was told again and every one laughed; and a few days later Giles told it to me, purring with pleasure and pride as he did so.

"I didn't know you had so much fun in you," I said, when he had finished.

He smiled his complacent smile.

"I'm very fond of a little bit of actin' now and then," he said. "I didn't frighten them too much, I hope. That little boy they call Bish seemed a bit scared when I called him a sinner. But I slipped him a Bradbury to make up for it, before I left. They're nice kids. I shall see them again."

CHAPTER XXX

IN WHICH WE MEET WITH SOLIDARITY

OF all Genevra's nephews and nieces to whom a little money might be of real assistance, Cyril Stanton, working away so gaily in the East End, seemed to me the most deserving—now that Alistair was out of it. But the looseness with which he viewed his declaration of belief was an obstacle that had to be considered. Genevra had the deepest reverence for the Church, and a very sensitive conscience, and Cyril would need some very strong support if he were to overcome her natural repugnance to his cheerful disregard of the mystical element in his office. Hence I hesitated.

While hesitating I thought suddenly of my uncle, the Bishop of Dunchester. Of course! I would put the case to him. He should decide.

If the Bishop could accept Cyril as an ally and be a little blind to his want of orthodoxy, why, then Genevra, I was sure, would too; for my uncle had always been one of her heroes.

Bishops are of two varieties: the shrewd and masterful, and the shrewd and saintly. My uncle belonged to the second division.

I reached Dunchester at about half-past three, and learning that the Bishop would not be back till dinner time, I wandered about the quiet close, with its bland Georgian façades, and in the cathedral.

But the cathedral, for all its majesty, seemed so dead, so remote from life. Some one was always locking something up. My idea of a church is a place to enter when you will and drift about in; but at Dunchester there were fixed times for such eccentric proceedings, and watchful suspicious vergers everywhere. I could no doubt have got a key from Ferguson, my uncle's butler, and been made free of every nook; but I resented that idea. I wanted it to be free to all.

I asked one of the less forbidding-looking vergers why it was ever closed.

"It's open for services," he said.

"Yes. But one can't walk about then. These cathedrals are national possessions. They are masterpieces of architectural art as well as conventicles, and people have the right to study them and loiter in them."

Loiter was a bad word to have employed.

"That's just it," he said. "We don't hold with loitering. You should see the damage the people do too if they're not watched. They're not to be trusted."

"But surely you must run the risk?" I said. "It's God's house. He can protect it."

This struck him as such a revolutionary idea that he was dumb.

"Besides," I said, "the damage that twenty persons might do would be as nothing if one poor soul in need of comfort found it here."

"We don't look at it like that," he said; and I believed him.

Dunchester is a beautiful cathedral, but it is cold. It spreads no arms. The Church, often a mother, is no mother there. And this is odd, considering how humane and understanding is my uncle the Bishop.

All his thoughts are towards kindness, sympathy, solace.

It comes to this, I suspect, that vergers are stronger than prelates.

"Is the rule against smoking in the bedrooms still enforced?" I asked Ferguson, while I was preparing for dinner.

"His Lordship would much prefer that you didn't," said Ferguson.

"I'm over fifty," I reminded him. "What would be the penalty?"

"It would distress his Lordship," said Ferguson.

"Would it distress his Lordship," I inquired, "if I had a whisky and soda? I am very tired."

"It would distress his Lordship less if you allowed me to bring you a glass of his special sherry," said Ferguson; and he departed on this Christian errand, while I began to dress.

I found the Bishop, who was looking very old and frail—he was over eighty—waiting for me in his study.

"There is no hostess for you to-night," he explained. "Honora is away."

I was glad. Honora was a stately assertive lady, a niece of the Bishop's late wife.

"She expressed her regret at missing you," my uncle resumed, "and asked me particularly to get your opinion of the new wall-paper and curtains in the morning-room. She is spending a few days at Lambeth Palace."

Dinner was now announced and a very excellent episcopal meal it was.

"Now, my boy, tell me what you have been doing," said my uncle, when we were left alone with the polished mahogany and the decanters.

I like being called my boy, even though I know

how far from boyhood I have strayed. No one calls me a boy but this gentle white-haired old man.

I told him about Geneva's money and my adventures in search of a fitting beneficiary.

He seemed to be deeply interested.

I went into each case in turn, beginning with Alistair.

"It is questionable," he said, "if a man should be an artist only; but I can understand the fascination. And for mastery of such a difficult elusive medium, life is so short."

"If we are to have the best pictures, the painter must never relax," I said.

"No, I suppose not," he replied. "But the question is, would not the second best do? So many people seem to prefer them. And then the artist would be able to do other things as well. Saint Luke, who was an artist, found time also to be an Evangelist.

"You say that young Muir refused to take any money," he continued. "I like that. If he carries that independence through life he will perhaps be doing enough in the way of subsidiary tasks."

"There obviously must be portrait painters," I said, indicating the row of bishops of Dunchester on the walls of the room. "I see that your own picture is now among them."

"Ah yes," he said. "But it is not too cheerful to be one of an unending line. There are too many reminders of mortality as it is. That is the worst of living in a dynastic dwelling: you know you are only a temporary occupant and another is waiting to succeed you. A man who builds himself a new house has no such feeling: he has had no predecessors. Ordinary tenants of houses spend no time in thinking of those other tenants who came before and are to come after. But here it is different. And all my

life I have lived in dynastic dwellings. First at school, then at Oxford, then as a vicar, then as a rector, then as a canon, then as a dean, and now in this Palace here. I have been moving on continually and every abode was a *memento mori*. But go on with your candidates for annuities," he urged.

I told him about Phoebe.

"I seem to know her personally," he said. "Dunche-ster has many Phoebes. All cathedrals are surrounded by them."

I told him about Donald, the actor.

"Yes, actors," he said. "They are a strange race. King James the First called them rogues and vagabonds and not altogether without reason. Rogues—I don't know. But vagabonds certainly, using the word in its true sense of wanderer. And yet there is a wonderful fascination about the theatre. As a youth I was mad to go on the stage myself. When I was at Oxford I was taken behind the scenes at the Hay-market to see Buckstone. That must have been in 1863 or thereabouts: a most amusing choleric fellow. When Sir Squire Bancroft was at Dunche-ster to read the 'Christmas Carol' he stayed here, and we had a long sitting together talking about the stage. We are the same age, he and I, and I wish I had half his good looks. A good vintage year he calls ours—1841—for in addition to ourselves, King Edward VII was born in it, and 'Mr. Punch'."

"You would hardly call Sir Squire Bancroft a rogue and vagabond?" I said.

"Least of all men!" he replied.

It was a natural transition from Donald to Cyril, the curate, and I began on his case.

"Donald," I said, "has a brother who is a curate—they illustrate the alliance of Church and Stage of which we so often hear. He is perhaps the most

interesting of all these young people to you," I said ; and I rapidly sketched Cyril's position and waited for his reply.

" Tell me about Giles," he said. " Poor Giles ! "

" Poor Giles ? " I had a mental picture of Giles hearing the adjective ! Whatever else he may have thought of himself it could never have been as an object of pity.

" Why ' poor ' ? " I asked.

" I call all men poor who live only for themselves," said the Bishop. " No matter what other riches they may possess, they miss the true ones. Giles should have married."

" Apropos of marriage," I said, " do you think that all clergymen should marry ? "

" I do," said the Bishop.

This seemed to give me another opening. " Genevra's nephew the curate——" I began.

" Had your wife no niece but Phoebe ? " he asked.

I told him about Winnie Musters.

" A trainer's wife ! " he exclaimed. " What worlds within worlds there are ! And how you are to be envied this curious search of yours, that takes you into such odd avenues. Do you know, I have never seen a horse-race ? But I can remember distinctly the excitement at home when Voltigeur won the Derby. That was in 1850, when I was a child of nine. My father, although he was not a betting man, won quite a lot of money in a sweepstake and he gave us each five golden sovereigns. I have never felt so rich since.

" And those little children of your niece's," he continued, " do you think they go to church ? "

" They were perfectly mannered," I said. " Their mother is delightful and they had a very superior nurse."

"It is all so strange, so strange," he muttered. "Worlds within worlds."

"The question of conduct without theology?" I began.

"Did you say that young Muir was married?" the Bishop asked.

"No," I said. "Not yet. But he is going to be. Directly, almost. I am, as a matter of fact, giving her away." And I told him about Rose and about her mother and their home at Rye.

"Cyril Stanton," I resumed.

"Rye?" he repeated. "How well I remember Rye! I was staying at Winchelsea one long vacation and we used to walk over to Rye every evening to the George—I think it was—yes, the George—to play billiards. It was a long walk to take for a game of billiards. It is probably all different now.

"I remember Camber Castle as it rose from the mist," he said. "And the sheep. Tremendous sheep they used to seem—we would stumble on them sometimes in the dark." He laughed.

"Am I to put the worst construction on that stumbling?" I asked.

"We were very young," he said. "And so this lady and her daughter live at Rye. I should like to see that country again, but it's too late. There was an old fellow at Winchelsea," he hurried on, "who had the most marvellous museum. He collected everything. Among other things I remember he had one of those mermaids that they show you at Aden. A huge fish, horribly human. How odd that I should recall that! Do you know I don't believe I have thought of that monstrous thing for nearly sixty years: more than your whole lifetime? How strange the memory is! I often wonder where it can store

all its wares. As old Jeremy Taylor says, 'What a piece of mystery is man!'

"Tell me," he said, after a pause, "about the others."

I told him about Selwyn.

"I wonder," he said, "why he was called Selwyn. Could it have been after the Bishop?"

"He shows no signs of it," I replied. "But he doesn't interest me very much. There is something hard about him and very assertive, and I didn't care for his attitude to his mother. The nephew who really seemed to me worth helping is the curate."

"Are there no more girls?" the Bishop asked.

I told him about Nollie.

He was thoughtful.

"And this child," he inquired after a while, "you say she is getting rid of her husband. No chance of reconciliation?"

"They don't seem to require each other," I said. "They go their own way."

"It is all very strange," he remarked. "The world is in an odd state. But I am old enough to know that rhythm is a governing factor. There will be a swing back. What England seems most in need of is some powerful quickening spirit, some magnetic idealist with a passionate faith in purity and truth. We have become materialistic, sceptical, pleasure-loving. Above all, too tolerant and cynical." He sighed.

"Well, my boy," he resumed in brighter tones, "you and I at any rate were happy in our marriages. I miss my dear wife more every day."

He became pensive; but I determined to make one more effort for Cyril.

"This young East End curate"—I began brightly.

"We mustn't talk any more now," he said firmly, looking at the clock. "It is later than I usually am and to-morrow will be a heavy day. There is an important meeting. Good night, my boy."

CHAPTER XXXI

IN WHICH A STRANGER ENTERS FROM THE NEW WORLD

“**T**HERE’S a lady waiting to see you,” said Rhoda, in her least human manner, on the afternoon of my return from Dunchester.

Rhoda is never wholly human, but in certain moods of disapproval she becomes an inhabitant of the moon. She particularly objects to callers of her own sex.

“Do I know her?” I asked.

“I don’t think so,” she replied.

“Then why on earth did you let her in?”

“I thought perhaps you would be vexed if I didn’t,” said Rhoda, “after she gave her name.”

“What is it?” I asked.

“Miss Thorold,” said Rhoda.

“Miss Thorold?” I searched my memory for Genevra’s cousins. There were some distant male Thorolds, but I had no personal knowledge of them.

“What is she like?” I asked.

“She sounded like an American,” said Rhoda.

Well, I must see her, I supposed: Genevra would have wished me to.

“Where is she?” I asked.

“In the library,” said Rhoda. “I thought it was safer than the dining-room.”

That was our prudent Rhoda through and through.

In the library there are only books, but in the dining-room is the table silver. First editions are nothing to her.

I advanced to the library and entered.

A pretty girl was looking out of the window. Medium height, nice colour, very stylishly dressed.

"You are Mr. Cavanagh Beckett?" she said inquiringly, in a marked American voice, but a very musical one

I agreed.

"Then will you please read this," she said, handing me a letter. "It tells all about me. It was meant for Mr. Lancelot Thorold, but he's gone abroad. His housekeeper advised me to bring it on here."

Opening other people's letters is not much in my line, and Heaven knew what kind of a secret concerning Vaddy this might reveal. Vaddy and wild oats had been by no means strangers to each other.

"Do you think I ought to read it?" I asked.

"Sure," she said. "It's only to explain who I am. Didn't Mr. Thorold have a brother named Horace?"

"Yes," I said.

"Well, the letter is from Horace's wife," she said. "My mother."

"You are Horace's daughter!" I exclaimed. "How very interesting! And what is your name?"

"Jenny," she said. "I was named after my aunt" (she called it ant) "Genevra."

"That was my wife," I said. "My dear girl, I am delighted to see you. How I wish that your aunt could have lived to know this. She died last year—almost a year ago."

She looked genuinely shocked. "That's bad," she said. "I'm sorry—I truly am. She's the one I wanted to meet most. So you're my uncle," she

continued. "Uncle what? I shall have to call you uncle, shan't I?"

I told her that Cavanagh was my only name.

"Cavanagh?" she said. "It's on the hefty side, but I dare say I can manage it. K or C?"

I told her. "Some of my nephews and nieces call me Uncle Cav.," I added. "Perhaps you would, too."

"I surely will," she said. "And now please read what Momma says."

I opened the letter and read as follows:

DEAR MR. THOROLD,—

The bearer of this is your niece Jenny, the daughter of your brother Horace. Her father died last year and we are visiting the old country. I want Jenny to get to know it and to meet any of her relations who want to meet her. I am not well enough to go out myself. We are staying at the Ritz—"So they've got money, then," was, I fear, the sordid thought that flashed through my mind here)—and expect to be in London for about a month before going on to Paris.

I am,

Yours truly,

LILY THOROLD.

"I'm sorry your mother's ill," I said.

"Poor Momma! Yes, she's a good deal of an invalid. Stomach trouble. She lies up most days."

I rang the bell and told Rhoda we would have tea at once.

"Now," I said, when we were comfortable, "tell me all about it. Tell me about your father. I never knew him, but your Aunt Genevra told me a little. He completely disappeared."

She was natural and easy, with all her country's assurance.

"Poppa wouldn't ever write," she said, "or let Momma. He had the feeling that so far as his family was concerned he was dead. It was very wrong, but we had to humour him. We both had to. He was a very difficult proposition, but the sweetest thing on earth. He died last year. He was a long time sick."

She told me everything that she knew. Her father had had a hard time at first, in California, where he went for his health. Gradually, however, he had made good. He had recovered his strength and his looks, with a new purposefulness added; and a local magnate had been glad to have him act as secretary, an educated Oxford man being a rarity out there. From secretary he had passed to higher positions and then to partner, and when the magnate died Horace became a magnate in his stead. He had then moved east and had taken up other schemes, and when he died last year he was a rich man.

There had been other children, but Jenny was the only one to survive and she was just twenty.

Momma had long been bent on a visit to England. They were at the Ritz, where they had gotten a dandy suite, and it tickled them to death to find how cheap everything was after New York.

"And what are you proposing to do with yourself now you are here?" I asked.

She smiled questioningly. She was really very pretty.

"Well," she said, "I was rather banking on Uncle Lancelot showing me the sights. But I don't know what I'll do now he's quitted."

"Should I do instead?" I asked. "I'm not a real uncle, but I was the husband of your real aunt, after whom you were named."

"Would you?" she said. "That would be bully. I'd like nothing so much. Oh," she added, "I was forgetting—here's another letter for you."

"Why didn't you give it me with the first?" I asked.

"Momma told me not to." She smiled a little ruefully. "Momma told me not to give it unless you—I mean Uncle Lancelot—were nice. She thought perhaps you'd give me the frozen mit. But I think you're real nice."

I opened the envelope and found not a letter but her mother's marriage lines. A registrar's certificate, recording the nuptials, strictly within the law although not ecclesiastically blessed, of Horace Lingard Thorold, aged twenty-three, and Lily Bates, aged twenty-five, thirty and more years ago.

The fact that she had given her age as two years more than Horace's struck me very forcibly, and I was conscious of some little emotion, which I hope I did not display, when I handed the envelope back. I felt ashamed that this paper should be needed; that it should have to be shown to any of us—or that the poor woman should think it necessary—before we could behave decently.

"You will give your mother my kind regards," I said, "and say that if she would like to see me I will call."

"I don't think Momma is receiving much," said Jenny. "Social duties are not her strong suit. If you could name a good doctor she'd be obliged."

I took Jenny back to the Ritz in a taxi and arranged to call for her the next morning; and then I stopped at Giles's in Half Moon Street and told him about her and asked him if he would like to meet her.

"No, thanks," said Giles. "I hate 'em all. They talk through their horrible noses."

"Her nose is a very charming one," I said.

"But she talks through it," he asserted. "You're not denyin' that."

"Her voice is attractive," I said.

"You were always so lenient," was his reply. "Watch out that they don't bite your ear. I know these wives and daughters of long lost brothers. They'll bleed you white."

"On the contrary," I said, "they're rolling. They're staying at the Ritz."

"Rollin', are they?" exclaimed Giles, with the amiability that the mention of wealth always bred in him. "Oh well, you're lucky. By the way," he said, "what have you been doin'? I rang you up last evenin' and you were out of town."

I told him I had been to see Uncle James.

"And how is the old bird?" he inquired. "He must be gettin' on for a hundred. Good long-lived stock, ours."

He smiled indulgently. He liked the thought of remaining on earth when others were under it. But that, as I was to discover, was not the only reason for the complacency which the idea of the Beckett longevity caused him.

"By the way," he said, as I rose to go—"Nollie's got her divorce."

I left him surveying himself in the mirror with every sign of approval.

CHAPTER XXXII

IN WHICH *TERRA INCOGNITA* BECOMES KNOWN

FOR a girl coming from a country where the flattery of her sex is a national industry, Jenny was singularly objective. It is the tendency of American women to be each the axis on which the world revolves, but Jenny was unique in being far more interested in what was going forward than in her own personality, mentality or subliminal self. This was due to her English blood, I suppose, for she was American enough in most ways; and as I watched her and listened to her I marvelled again at the rapidity with which Americans can be made.

Although she was staunchly loyal to her country, the land of her forbears called to her, and her desire for sight-seeing was almost morbid. The consequence was that, in default of any other cicerone, I took her to all the places to which we Londoners go only when strangers are in our charge. And I am grateful to her for enlarging my knowledge of our city. But for Jenny I should never have seen the wax effigies in Westminster Abbey nor have known that they were cute; I should never have visited the Temple courts and found that they were cunning. But for her I should never have gone again to the Tower, which I last saw when I was ten, and which seems, save for a contiguous bridge of noble design, not to have undergone any change since that distant day. She called

it a chunk of history. We made a tour of Wren's churches ; we traced a portion of London Wall ; we crossed London Bridge to find the Tabard Inn and satisfy her interest—purely Platonic—in Chaucer. We saw half-crowns being made at the Mint. We penetrated the sanctuaries of the Charterhouse and the Foundling Hospital. And everything that she saw she approved of with ecstasy. " This little old burg," she said, " is some museum, sure."

Climb the Monument I would not, but waited below for ages until she reappeared, utterly unexhausted, but full of bewilderment that there was no elevator, as in the Woolworth Building in New York. This absence of elevators constantly perplexed her ; and she deplored also, and continually, our ice shortage and the scarcity of sundaes. I am making no reference to the day that comes betwixt the Saturday and Monday, but to a saccharine refreshment popular in God's own country and almost unknown in ours.

The oddest things delighted her. " Say, your buses are fine. I've been all the way from Victoria Station to Saint Albans and back on the front seat. There are a million buses in London to every one in New York.

" And your red letter-boxes. Aren't they just too sweet for anything ! Ours are green." I advised her to enjoy them to the full, while she could, for when she got to Paris she would find none at all and have to confide her correspondence to furtive and obviously untrustworthy receptacles secreted beneath tobacconists' windows.

Our policemen entranced her by their courtesy and bewildered her by their apparent lack of any lethal outfit. " Why don't they have clubs ? " she asked. " Doesn't anybody ever have to be hit ? But aren't they peaches too ? I spend half my time pretending

I don't know the way just to have them talk to me. They behave to me as if the only cure for sore eyes was an American girl."

"Tell me some of the differences between English people and Americans that have struck you," I once said.

She thought for a while. "Well, one thing I've noticed," she said, "is that in England you talk more about the folks you don't like, and in America we talk more about those we do."

"That's all in your favour," I said. "What else?"

"Well, in England," she said, "you seem to be able to speak about your great men, the King and the Premier, for instance, without tears."

"Perhaps that's in our favour," I said.

"I like your young men better than ours," she said: "those I've had the chance to meet. They've got more to say. I don't mean they talk more," she added hastily.

We partook of a formidable pudding in Fleet Street as a preparation to visiting Dr. Johnson's house in Gough Square. Not that she was of literary tastes, but she had a friend in Younkers who had made her promise to go there. Indeed, her knowledge of the Great Lexicographer was limited to the fact that he was the guy who refused to swallow the too hot mouthful. Under the same friend's instructions we walked through the Temple to see the grave of Goldsmith. "Was this the churchyard," she asked, "where he wrote the Elegy?"

Being in the City one afternoon—we had been eating turtle soup at Birch's—I did a desperate thing and took Jenny to see Giles, whose office is quite close to that honourable pastry-cook's.

It is true that Giles had expressed an unwillingness to meet her, but I knew that in her presence he would

be polite and he might quite easily be captured by her charm and her directness and be really kind and amusing.

Giles's firm rather prides itself on being old-fashioned and Jenny's surprise was intense at the leisureliness of the messenger who carried our names to high places, and the faded furniture of the little ante-room where we waited.

"Gee!" she said. "That calendar's a month out. And look at the clock—it's stopped."

Giles, who was enveloped in the grey mist of his after-lunch cigar, received us with stately punctiliousness.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Beckett," said Jenny, taking his hand.

"And how do you like London?" Giles asked, rather tamely, his eyes appraising her with, I could see, no little satisfaction.

Jenny told him, with ease and frankness, what she thought about it all.

"And how does this compare with Wall Street?" Giles asked her.

"This is about as much like Wall Street as those house-boats at Hampton Court are like the Mauretania," she said. "But it's kind of soothing to be here after all that noise and hustle—and it's a rest not to hear so much talk about money. At home a man tells the world about every dollar he makes. Here you're almost ashamed of it. At any rate it's a secret. No one, for example, would guess that any money was ever made in this office."

She could not have paid Giles a more subtle compliment. That is the end he has been trying for all his life: to have commercial success without any visible suggestion of vulgar competition or effort. He beamed.

"At home," Jenny went on, "every one is a busi-

ness man, and talks like it, after hours too ; but here business men want to be taken for something else even while they are working, and when they leave their offices they might be dukes. They call the ball-game our national pastime, but really our national pastime is talking about dollars. I can see it now, but I never thought of it till I'd been sea-sick three or four times and knew I was out of the country. My, I was sick ; but it was nothing to poor Momma ! ”

“ And how do you find your Uncle Cavanagh as a guide, philosopher and friend ? ” Giles asked. “ A bit on the slow side, I'm afraid. ”

“ No, he's great, ” Jenny affirmed stoutly. “ And by the time I've done with him he'll begin to know something about his own London. Do you know, he'd never been in the crypt of Saint Paul's till this morning. Isn't that just scandalous ? ”

With the most offensive hypocrisy Giles agreed with her—Giles, who probably had never been even in St. Paul's nave !

“ There's one place I'll bet he hasn't taken you to, ” he said, “ and that's the garden of the Bank of England. You can see that only with influence. If you like, we'll go now. ”

This was a conquest indeed, and I was so delighted that I made an excuse and left them to carry out the project alone, arranging to return in half an hour.

“ How did you find Giles ? ” I asked her on our way back to the Ritz.

“ He's a peach, ” she said. “ He reminded me of Genesis. ”

“ How ? ”

“ Where it says that God saw that it was good. Mr. Beckett looked at the Bank of England garden, which is the cutest place to find in the middle of the

City, as though he had created it. He's going to take me to the theatre one night soon."

Giles was equally approving of Jenny.

"I'm sorry I inflicted her on you," I said, not without malice. "I had forgotten for the moment how you hate them and their horrible voices."

"She's a nice girl," he replied. "She's simple and refined and you needn't apologize."

I felt that Giles had scored, and he looked as if he knew it too.

CHAPTER XXXIII

IN WHICH FESTIVITY IS MARRED

JENNY'S very natural desire to see some of her cousins led me to arrange a party, and when I told Giles that I was asking Nollie too, he expressed his willingness to smile upon the gathering. He went on to ask a question or two about the menu, for he never had trusted me as a caterer. The older brother again !

"I'm not drinkin' champagne myself just now," he volunteered ; "but don't let that keep you from havin' some. The others might like it. A little claret for me, but get the chill taken off, won't you ? "

As it happened, the party was a failure—a result due entirely to Giles's presence—or possibly to Nollie's. But it is certain that to have both of them there was a blunder.

If Giles had stayed away, Nollie could have sat in a corner all the evening with Donald and no one would have minded ; but the spectacle of that "damned mummer," as Giles called him, monopolizing his young friend enraged Giles to such an extent that he was not fit company for any one. Nor would Nollie take any hints. Most women—especially those in the pre-chattel stage—have considerable stores of perversity to draw upon, and Nollie drew great drafts on hers. What serious hopes of having made an impression by his good looks, his personal fascination, his bachelorhood, his wealth, or the assistance he had given her

in obtaining her freedom, Giles might have entertained, he lost that evening. It was twenty-five *versus* fifty-five, and twenty-five was winning. Nollie, after cutting herself off for so long from admiration and flirtation, was enjoying, in Donald's hands, both to the full.

If Giles had been absent this would not have mattered: one wants one's guests to be amused. But being there, and a piqued witness, he could not conceal his feelings, and he is the kind of man who expects others to pipe to his tune. When he is merry, the world must laugh; when he is depressed, there must be a corresponding gloom: the result of a lifetime spent in having his own way.

Jenny, who might have helped, was so happy with the Reverend Cyril, in another corner, that I had not the heart to separate them and get her to make a little fuss of the injured man. In short, the evening was marred, or made, by the brothers Stanton.

Phoebe's sympathetic efforts were of no avail, for she could bring no mischief to the attack. Giles has no use for any woman who is without either audacity or style, and Phoebe possesses only good works.

There remained the poet, whom I had placed next to Jenny at dinner, on account of his interest in America, but he naturally was worse than no one, for Giles declined to slough the skin of the employer, as of course he ought to have done, and put the youth at his ease. Giles, in fact, was as difficult as he could be, and had he been fifty years younger he would have been soundly slapped and sent to bed.

When Jenny came round to see me the next morning I asked for her views on her kith and kin.

"I didn't have any crush on Donald," she said. "He was too fresh. But the sin-buster's a peach."

By sin-buster, I gathered, she meant the Reverend Cyril Stanton.

"Fancy those two being brothers!" she exclaimed. "Cyril saw me home," she went on, "and on Saturday he's taking me to the Zoo, and on Sunday I'm going to have tea in his rooms."

"And how did you find Selwyn?" I asked.

"Oh, Selwyn!" she said. "Well, I guess I was a disappointment. He kept on asking me about American poets that I'd never heard of. And it's so tiring having to say no again and again. I wish people wouldn't ask me if I'd read this and that. Every one in England does. Wherever I go they say, 'Oh, Miss Thorold, have you read so and so?' 'Gee! I'm not over here to read,' I say: 'I'm over here to look around and enjoy myself.'"

"All through the soup and the fish and the entrée your nephew was asking me about American poets. Every kind of poet in the chipmunk magazines, but chiefly Amy Lowell. His thirst for information about Amy Lowell was something fierce. And I don't know Amy Lowell from Eve. The only American poets I know are Longfellow and Walt Mason. He'd never heard of Walt, and when I mentioned Longfellow I thought he'd die. I'm going to meet Cousin Alistair after all," she went on. "Phoebe gave me his address in Paris and I'm going to see his pictures. I love pictures. I'm just crazy to get to the Louvre to see 'Monna Lisa'. Gee, that smile! And I've promised to do all I can to be at his wedding in April. I long to see an English wedding."

"I wish you could have paid a little more attention to Giles, my brother," I said. "He was rather out in the cold."

"I did make an effort," she replied, "but all the time I was talking to him he was looking at Mrs. Leth-

bridge and that got my goat. A girl hates a man's eyes to stray."

The next time I saw Giles I said I was afraid he had been bored at the party,

"I hope I didn't show it," he replied. "The fact is I had a head. I'd had a very tirin' afternoon. By the way, how did that actor feller get there? Why isn't he appearin' somewhere?"

I said that Donald was rehearsing a new play.

"I didn't like the feller," Giles said. "I didn't care for the devil-dodger either. He was makin' some rather heavy runnin' with the American girl. Odd how women take to the cloth. I hope," he continued, "that none of Genevra's money is goin' to either of those brothers?"

I said I thought not.

"Or to the poet?" he asked. "I'm firin' him. He's no good. From what my head clerk tells me, he only came to us to make enough to get to America with. Just think of it! Usin' me as a means to cross the Atlantic! I should take it very hard if you were to encourage him after behavin' to the firm of Beckett and Frith like that!"

I said that I shouldn't. As a matter of fact, I thought that he ought to go into some business or profession seriously and stay near his mother. But he was headstrong and must learn his own lesson. No doubt he would learn it in America, if his only means of subsistence was free verse.

"By the way, what *are* you doin' with that money?" Giles asked. "Nothin'. And that's all you can do with it. Nothin'—or worse. Money you give people is their ruin, as I told you on the day I caught such a cold at poor Genevra's funeral. It's no good to 'em except as a makeshift, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it's only given as a sop to your own

conscience, to flatter yourself and make you feel good.

"I'm not talkin'," he went on, "about the money one gets from one's father. Inherited money. I don't mean that." He smiled his pleased smile. "I'm talkin' about what's called doles, grants, benefactions. They're all wrong, because the people who get 'em are wrong. They don't deserve 'em. They only get 'em because they've failed."

"Genevra thought differently," I said. And with that I came away.

CHAPTER XXXIV

IN WHICH THE QUEST ENDS VERY SUDDENLY

SINCE every event has its sequel, my poor little party could not escape, and at this moment Cyril Stanton is in Paris with Jenny and her mother, as Jenny's *fiancé*, and rumour is busy with the names of Roland Murchison, the actor, and Mrs. Lethbridge. It is a good match for Cyril, for Jenny's *dot* will be considerable and incidentally it sets my mind at ease regarding his claim on Genevra's bounty.

What kind of a sin-buster's wife Jenny will make, we shall see. That she will entertain the parish is certain: and that is not nothing. As for Nollie, I confess to being surprised: for I had never thought she would come out into the open in that way, after the views she had expressed to me. But one must expect inconsistency. Every moment conditions are different, and therefore we are; every moment we are older, and there is less of life to live, and the thought can lead to odd impulses. So long as love lasts I don't see why she should not be happy, for Donald is amusing and comely. And they might be the one exceptional couple. Miracles have happened.

There is not much more to relate. In fact, just one little incident.

Stories and life have as a rule so little to do with

one another that it is exciting suddenly to come to a point where they meet. The novelist has to select the mountain tops, so to speak ; whereas life is spent almost wholly on the plain or in the valleys. His peaks may be genuine enough, but their apparent frequency gives them an air of falseness.

Anyway, I emerged from my club one afternoon just in time to be cannoned into by a newspaper boy in a condition of hectic and vociferous haste. For once, his feverishness had nothing to do with the activities of the Friend of Man. It was not a racing result that the voice proclaimed, but a sensational commercial collapse. And the intelligent reader who has done me the honour to persevere with this narrative from the beginning will probably guess what.

If I had no suspicion myself it is because I have not accustomed myself to think in terms of romance. Indeed, so little fiction do I peruse that the odds are heavy against my ever opening the present book should it have been written by any one else.

The consequence was that I bought the paper merely out of ordinary curiosity, untinged by foreboding ; and the shock was therefore the greater when I found that the defaulting concern was the City and Southern Counties Insurance Company, in which all Geneva's money for so long had been invested.

Such disasters are a commonplace of city life. The only novel feature of this crash was that the managing director had not fled to some land where there is no extradition, but was remaining to face the music.

My feelings were mixed. As my own income proceeded from different sources, I had none of the ordinary personal panic that these failures bring with them ; but I was conscious of a great disappointment for

Genevra's sake, in the breakdown of all her kindly benefactory purposes. I also realized that my occupation was gone; my almoning was over, and though, it is true, this almoning had consisted almost wholly in preparing to begin, in various fastidious hesitancies, and in one or two frustrations, yet it was none the less done, finished.

While I was dressing for dinner I was rung up. It was, as I expected, Giles, and I could see his superior omniscience lighting up his features as he spoke.

"Well?" he said.

"Well," I replied.

"A pity you didn't sell out, isn't it?"

"I suppose so," I replied.

"What do you mean—suppose so?" he asked testily. "How can there be any doubt?"

"Some misfortunes happen for the best," I said. "Perhaps this is one."

"Rubbish!" said Giles. "I never heard such rubbish. Money's money, and the loss of it is a crime."

I made no reply.

"Are you there?" he asked sharply.

"Yes," I said.

"Then why don't you say something? The telephone service is difficult enough without us addin' to it."

I apologized meekly. "I was thinking," I said.

"What are you goin' to do now after wastin' so much time?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said, "and I don't agree that I have wasted any time. I have had a very amusing year, which I never expected to have. And I've met a lot of new people, which I had lost the knack of doing. And several children. And, by the way,"

I added, "you met the children too and liked them."

"Well," he said. "What if I did? What has all this to do with the fact that the money's gone? That's the serious thing. Gone."

"It served a purpose," I replied.

THE END

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42

